



# British Birds

March 2015 • Vol.108 • 119–184

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NATURAL HISTORY  
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Scarce migrants 2011–12:  
non-passerines

The Redhead in Britain

White-winged Scoter





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# British Birds

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Front-cover photograph: Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*, Huttoft, Lincolnshire, April 2011.

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# Parrot Patrol

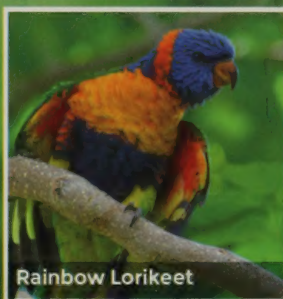
Evening on Kangaroo Island, South Australia, and the soft cracking of cones carries across a wooded valley in the still evening air. Your binoculars reveal the ruffled chocolate-brown heads of three Glossy Black-Cockatoos high in the branches of a casuarina grove. Two more alight, flashing scarlet tail feathers. You count carefully, as over the next 20 minutes the roost fills up. Thirty-three birds in total: that's roughly one-third of the world's population of this highly endangered subspecies.

Some 2,500km to the north, in Northern Territory, you round a bend in the Katherine River to see four similar-looking birds perched on a sandbank, drinking quietly. But these have bigger bills, longer tails and a thick crest tilted forward like a helmet: Red-tailed Black-cockatoos. They are noisier too, screeching raucously as they take off – revealing bold red tail feathers – then flap away with easy, long-winged elegance.

Cockatoos are, of course, parrots. And, like all members of the order Psittaciformes, they hold a special appeal for birders. This may be because of their vivid colours, charismatic behaviour and great intelligence. It may also be because European visitors have no parrots of our own back home, bar the invasive Ring-necked Parakeet. Either way, with some 56 species, Australia is indisputably parrot central, and there is nowhere better to get your fix than in South Australia and Northern Territory.

The good news is that you needn't look far. In both states many species are abundant. Garrulous sulphur-crested cockatoos clamber around blue gums, screeching as they erect their spiky crests. Little Corellas and Galahs, the latter a flaming pink below, alight in flocks on playing fields and sheep pasture. Outrageously colourful Rainbow Lorikeets and their close relatives in the north, Red-collared Lorikeets, flaunt their garish plumage around suburbia, while Rosellas – Northern in the north and Adelaide in the south – make an equally eye-catching splash among parks and gardens.

And then there are the rarities. A birder in Northern Territory might head for Pine Creek, near Katherine, in search of the state endemic Hooded Parrots that arrive every day to drink from the sprinklers, flashing their diagnostic turquoise underparts, golden wings and smart black hood. In South Australia, they might comb Gluepot Reserve for a glimpse of the elusive Scarlet-chested Parrot dashing overhead or check out eucalyptus groves outside Adelaide for the gorgeous Regent Parrot, with its canary-yellow body and long blue tail.



Rainbow Lorikeet



Scarlet-chested Parrot







**Flinders Ranges - home to the infamous Night Parrot?**



**Katherine Gorge**

To the non-birder, parrots are synonymous with tropical forest and desert islands. Yet Australia has a parrot species – usually several – for each of its varied habitats. Thus in South Australia, the coastline of the Eyre Peninsula is home to the highly localised rock parrot, which searches for seeds among the sand dunes, while the dense mallee scrub further inland is prime habitat for the handsome Mallee Ringneck, with its green body and long blue tail. In Northern Territory, the casuarinas along the coast provide excellent habitat for the striking Red-winged Parrot, with its bold scarlet shoulder patches, while monsoon forest might produce a nomadic group of Varied Lorikeets, stripping the blossom from flowering trees.

Even the arid outback of central Australia, where South Australia and

Northern Territory meet, is excellent parrot country. Cockatoos are a common sight in the mulga scrub, among them small flocks of the impressive Major Mitchell's Cockatoo, with its pink underparts and scarlet-striped crest. Cockatiels are found throughout the arid country, and when good rains bring plentiful food,

Budgerigars gather in immense, wheeling flocks to alight at waterholes and sometimes descend on fields of ripening wheat.

And then there's the Aussie birder's Holy Grail: the Night Parrot. This nocturnal species was once so rare – not seen

once between 1912 and 1979 – that it was presumed extinct.

A handful of sightings since then suggest that it still frequents the dusty outback of central Australia, and perhaps in greater numbers than previously thought. This enigmatic bird is said to emerge at dusk, to utter a mournful whistle and to have a brief

quail-like flight before it drops to the ground and scuttles for cover. It's a parrot, in short, that is a far cry from your average 'pretty Polly'. So, if you want to make a name for yourself, check out the saltbush and spinifex at twilight. And keep your fingers crossed.

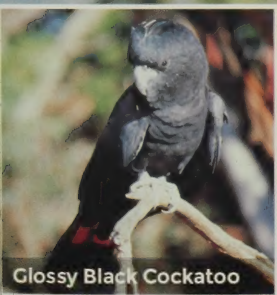
a far cry  
from your  
average  
'pretty Polly'

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**Major Mitchell's Cockatoo**



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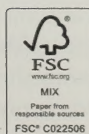
- 120 *BB eye* Ian Carter
- 122 News and comment *Adrian Pitches*
- 126 Report on scarce migrant birds in Britain in 2011–12: non-passerines  
*Steve White and Chris Kehoe*
- 158  How the Redheads got the chop: the BBRC review of  
British records of Redhead *Martin Garner and Adam Rowlands*
- 168 White-winged Scoter in North-east Scotland: new to Britain  
*Chris Gibbins, Paul Baxter and Hywel Maggs*
- 176 Obituary
- 177 Letters
- 179 Reviews
- 183 Recent reports



This time last year I suggested that the 2011 and 2012 Scarce Migrants reports would appear in separate, one-year reports, but since our compilers made better progress than expected with the 2012 data it seemed sensible to do one more multi-year report. The passerines will follow next month, to bring us almost up to date. Together with two articles about properly rare wildfowl, there is most certainly a watery theme to this issue.

Yet it is the Hen Harrier that continues to dominate the news pages. The use of satellite data to expose malpractice in the countryside was perhaps not one of the most obvious benefits of the new tracking technologies that have become more widely available in the last decade, but it is certainly having an impact. Hopefully, in years to come, we will be able to look back on the Hen Harrier's current plight as a watershed, not just in terms of highlighting illegal and unacceptable 'management' practices, but also in terms of real progress with raptor persecution.

*Roger Riddington*



**British Birds aims to:** ❖ provide an up-to-date magazine for everyone interested in the birds of the Western Palearctic; ❖ publish a range of material on behaviour, conservation, distribution, ecology, identification, movements, status and taxonomy as well as the latest ornithological news and book reviews; ❖ maintain its position as the journal of record; and ❖ interpret scientific research on birds in an easily accessible way.



## Ethnic cleansing, or a fight for identity and survival?

We are lucky here in Britain that the majority of our most widespread and familiar birds are the same native species that have been living here for thousands of years. Most were here before humans started to have a major impact on the landscape and, with varying levels of success, they have adapted to the changes we have brought about. Other island countries have been far less fortunate. In New Zealand, for example, the introduction of invasive predatory mammals has decimated the native bird fauna. Many of the remaining species are now restricted to offshore islands or a few remaining patches of natural forest where they are protected from predators by huge, electrified fences and poison baits. Unsurprisingly, the control of invasive non-native species in New Zealand is pursued vigorously, to try to save what is left, and tends not to be seen as contentious.

In contrast, the control of non-natives is often highly contentious in Britain and there are some extreme views on both sides of the argument, particularly when it comes to birds and mammals. One view is that, ideally, we should be rid of the lot of them – none have a right to be here and they inevitably compete with native wildlife for food or other resources. Practicalities make eradication of all non-natives impossible, of course, though the development of new technologies such as oral contraception could widen our aspirations in future. At the other extreme are those who say ‘live and let live’. If non-natives become established as a result of human intervention, then so be it – they have just as much right to an existence as any of our long-established native species.

I’m somewhere in between the two views outlined above, although leaning far more towards getting rid of the lot of them. I could happily live without introduced Canada Geese *Branta canadensis*, Egyptian Geese *Alopochen aegyptiaca*, Mandarin Ducks *Aix galericulata*, Ruddy Ducks *Oxyura jamaicensis*, Red-legged Partridges *Alectoris rufa*, Common Pheasants *Phasianus colchicus*, Monk Parakeets *Myiopitta monachus*, Mink *Neovison vison*, Grey

Squirrels *Sciurus carolinensis* and Fallow Deer *Dama dama*, to name just a few. As highlighted recently by Jeremy Greenwood (*Brit. Birds* 106: 240), biodiversity means more than local species richness. It is about maintaining differences on a larger scale, rather than accepting a similar mix of species across large parts of the globe. I am, however, conscious of some apparent inconsistencies and even confusion in my own views. I would, for example, be very reluctant to see the back of the Brown Hare *Lepus capensis*, Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus* and Little Owl *Athene noctua*, for reasons that I’m not sure are entirely defensible. As with the control of native wildlife (*Brit. Birds* 106: 490–491), our views on non-natives are influenced not only by sound evidence and logic but also by our own experiences and personal prejudices.

The Brown Hare is one of my favourite mammals and one I see regularly in the fields around our house in northeast Cambridgeshire. It has adapted well to intensively managed farmland and often appears to be the only living thing eking out an existence in some of the more barren arable fields in this area. Although introduced originally by humans, it has been with us, sharing our landscapes, for thousands of years. Is it justifiable to treat it as an honorary native because of this? Perhaps, though already I fear the lines are starting to blur. The Rabbit has not been here for as long as the Brown Hare but long enough for it to have become deeply integrated into our ecosystems and food webs. It maintains our remaining flower-rich semi-natural grasslands by keeping the sward short. And it is a vital food source for a whole array of native fauna including Red Foxes *Vulpes vulpes*, Stoats *Mustela erminea*, Common Buzzards *Buteo buteo* and Red Kites *Milvus milvus*. Removing this non-native from the landscape would have profound effects on many native species. Should we therefore welcome this species?

We are lucky enough to have Little Owls nesting in one of the mature trees in the garden. The nest hole is overlooked by my



study and for three years running they have provided a welcome distraction from the computer screen throughout the breeding season. The Little Owl was introduced relatively recently and as a pugnacious defender of nest holes it certainly has the potential to affect native species. Scraps between the adult owls and the local Stock Doves *Columba oenas* are frequent in spring and often end with feathers of the native species floating down onto the lawn below. Logic suggests that Little Owls should not be welcomed. The only defence I can offer is that the Little Owl's native range includes most of Europe and it is found just across the English Channel on the near Continent. The fact that it has not made it to Britain unaided is, it could be argued, a mere quirk of geography and rising sea levels. Had things been different, then it could very well have spread here naturally. Is it reasonable to treat it as another honorary native?

The problem with these arguments is that they blur the boundaries between natives and non-natives. Everyone's criteria for what may constitute an 'honorary native' will be different. Everyone will have their own favourite species for which they can make a special case. How far back does an introduction need to be before the species should be accepted? How close does the native range have to be? How entrenched in our ecosystems must a species become before it is spared? I love watching Brown Hares and Little Owls but is it really tenable to defend them and, at the same time, wish that Grey Squirrels and Rose-ringed Parakeets *Psittacula krameri* could be eradicated?

In more troubled moments I wonder if we can ever expect to develop a coherent approach to non-native species. The consequences of taking no action, however, are considerable. While we are fortunate in comparison with places like New Zealand, the adverse effects of invasive non-natives have been well documented and our vertebrate fauna is becoming more and more dominated by them. The Rabbit, Grey Squirrel, Brown Rat *Rattus norvegicus*, House Mouse *Mus musculus* and Muntjac *Muntiacus reevesi* are among our most familiar mammals. And Pheasants, Red-legged Partridges and Canada Geese dominate the bird fauna in many lowland landscapes, at least in terms of

biomass. The Rose-ringed Parakeet is increasing rapidly and its requirement for holes to nest in means that native hole-nesters may lose out as it continues to spread. Already, it is probably the bird species most often encountered by the inhabitants of our capital – whether they recognise its raucous call or not. Other non-native birds have either established a foothold in Britain, including Black Swan *Cygnus atratus*, Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* and Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*, or are waiting in the wings for their chance, such as Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* and House Crow *Corvus splendens*. Their potential impacts are uncertain but it is unrealistic to expect that they can all thrive here without increasingly significant adverse impacts on native wildlife.

With limited resources we have no choice but to prioritise efforts to control non-natives and it seems sensible to concentrate on species that are recent introductions, have the potential for significant adverse impacts on native wildlife (or economic interests) and are well beyond their native range. I have little sympathy with the view that all control of non-native animals is unacceptable and I detect a certain amount of desperation in some of the arguments put forward to justify that position. Eradicating introduced species is not 'ethnic cleansing' as is sometimes suggested, any more than shooting a pigeon or swatting a wasp is 'murder'. Humans and other animals are not the same thing. If we allow the complexities of the arguments to get in the way of action, we risk sleepwalking into a gradual acceptance of more and more non-native species and a further eroding of our native wildlife. Not so much 'live and let live' as 'live and let die'.

Ian Carter





# News and comment

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of *British Birds*

## Satellite-tagged Hen Harrier shot

That headline looks sadly familiar – but the latest outrage did not occur in the British uplands, instead it happened in Ireland.

'Heather', a female Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* named by local schoolchildren, fledged from a nest in Co. Kerry in 2013. She was fitted with a satellite tag as part of a joint project between the National Parks & Wildlife Service and local community group IRD Duhallow to raise awareness of these special raptors. Her movements were tracked online by thousands of people ([www.henharrierireland.blogspot.ie](http://www.henharrierireland.blogspot.ie)) and she ranged widely throughout Ireland until she was shot down in Kerry in January.

It was a high-profile killing. The Irish Minister for Agriculture, Simon Coveney TD, denounced it, saying: 'No-one should take the law into their own hands' (how many British front-benchers have you heard speak out against raptor persecution?) but other Irish politicians have been vilifying Hen Harriers in Ireland in recent months and the death of 'Heather' has to be seen in this context.

In Ireland, conflict between landowners and Hen Harriers is not about grouse – it's about forestry. The designation of six Special Protection Areas (SPAs) in Ireland in 2007 to safeguard the habitat of harriers – and other moorland birds – has resulted in a moratorium on commercial

conifer planting in these areas. The birds are now seen as a threat to farming livelihoods and have become a target for farmers struggling with changes to the EU Common Agricultural Policy.

Hen Harriers are largely dependent on the type of traditional farming in upland areas that has existed for generations. John Lusby of BirdWatch Ireland said: 'The current ban on additional planting of forestry within the SPAs is entirely necessary, given that commercial forestry already dominates the landscape there and an increase in forest cover is one of the primary threats both to the Hen Harrier and to other sensitive upland species.'

'Rural communities are struggling in marginal upland areas, but an unsustainable approach to commercial forestry is not the solution. Alternatives need to be put in place to allow the landowners to continue farming their land, in a viable manner, which is ultimately for the benefit of the local environment and rural communities.'

The Irish Government is currently finalising its Rural Development Plan. A Hen Harrier Threat Response Plan is also currently in preparation through the National Parks and Wildlife Service to deliver an effective framework for future Hen Harrier conservation both within and outside the SPA network. See [www.birdwatchireland.ie](http://www.birdwatchireland.ie)

## Hawk and Owl Trust flies into Hen Harrier storm

Back across the Irish Sea, Hen Harriers and their 'management' continue to arouse controversy in the birding community. The Hawk and Owl Trust (HOT) has put its head above the parapet and agreed to participate in a brood management trial of Hen Harriers, should any pair nest on or near a grouse moor. Essentially this means removing the chicks from the nest, rearing them in an aviary and then releasing the fledged juveniles elsewhere.

The HOT has consequently landed itself in hot water with a substantial section of the birding community. A poll by Rare Bird Alert attracted 750 voters, 70% of whom said the HOT was wrong to be playing into the hands of grouse-moor managers.

Writing on the HOT website [www.hawkandowl.org/hen-harriers](http://www.hawkandowl.org/hen-harriers), chairman Philip Merricks outlined the plan: 'Chicks would be removed from a nest at about a week old. Then taken to a heated aviary for about two weeks (until they can ther-

moregulate). Then taken out onto the moors into pens sheltered at one end and netted at the other so that they can become socially imprinted onto their release sites. Then released at about ten weeks. The big advantage of this method is that it is likely that four or five chicks would be raised to fledging whereas naturally, probably less than one would be, and if the nest was persecuted none would be. It seems pretty obvious as to what method of being raised the harrier chicks themselves would choose!'

The RBA team concluded that the HOT has failed to make its case in the court of birding public opinion. 'Judging by many of the comments left in the poll and the discussion on social media it is clear that there are some very strong feelings around the issue. A large number of the comments by those against the HOT's position point out that before any trial of brood management can take



place, the illegal persecution of Hen Harriers must stop and the laws protecting the species be properly enforced.

'This seems to be a line in the sand for many and the HOT themselves have said that this would

need to happen before a trial could take place. However, they also say that they could get involved in a trial as early as this breeding season so it is unclear how persecution could be proved to have ceased before then.' See [www.bit.ly/lzRjlqn](http://www.bit.ly/lzRjlqn)

## Birdfair raises £280,000 for marine birds

The now traditional cheque handover to BirdLife by Birdfair organisers Tim Appleton and Martin Davies took place at the WWT London Wetland Centre on 6th February. The sum raised at the 2014 Birdfair, the 25th anniversary event, was another record-breaking figure: £280,000. The money will be spent on the 'Protecting the World's Seas and Oceans' project, establishing marine protected areas for critical seabird breeding and feeding areas – and migration routes.

Birdfair 2015 is at Rutland Water on 21st–23rd August ([www.birdfair.org.uk](http://www.birdfair.org.uk)) and the theme of this year's Birdfair is 'Hope for migratory birds in the Eastern Mediterranean: action against illegal killing'. Birdfair funds will be used to reduce the scale and impact of illegal killing of migratory birds, and to improve bird protection in the region.

Tim Appleton said: 'I'm delighted that through Birdfair we can highlight the major issues for migrating birds in the Eastern Mediterranean



Robin Chittenden/FLPA

**68.** Rare seabirds such as Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus* are likely to benefit from Birdfair 2014.

where millions of birds are being slaughtered illegally as they fly to their breeding grounds and then return to their wintering grounds. It has to stop before it's too late for many vulnerable species.'

The Africa–Eurasia flyway is used by more than 25 species of bird facing the threat of global extinction, including Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* and Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita* – two of the world's rarest birds – and 64 out of 188 songbird species using the flyway are also in decline.

## BBRC Vagrants enter the Champions of the Flyway 2015

The Champions of the Flyway is a bird race in one of the world's great birding hotspots, southern Israel. Last year's inaugural race involved teams from all over the world competing to see who could find the most species in this area in a 24-hour period and, more importantly, who could raise the most money for conservation. Nearly US\$60,000 was raised, and this has inspired the BBRC Vagrants to try their hand this year.

The beneficiary of this year's race will be BirdLife Cyprus, and all funds raised will

go towards helping them to combat the illegal slaughter of migrant birds in Cyprus every year. For example, the so-called delicacy of 'Ambelopoulia' is a dish made from whole small passerines and consumed by locals and tourists alike. The capture of migrant birds using mist-nets and lime sticks (and the sale of Ambelopoulia) has been illegal since 1974, yet the law has seemingly little effect.

The BBRC team, of Paul French, Micky Maher and Richard Schofield, will be competing with other



teams from the UK and around the world. **And they need your help.** Any donation, no matter how small, will help BirdLife Cyprus to put a stop to this vile and barbaric slaughter. Please visit [www.justgiving.com/](http://www.justgiving.com/)

### Little Bustard shot in Norfolk

The RSPB has confirmed that the Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax* found dead beside a road near the village of Blofield, in Norfolk, on 22nd January had been shot. It was the fourth Little Bustard found in England this winter, following (live) birds in Dorset, Sussex and Yorkshire. The last, found at Fraithorpe near Bridlington on New Year's Eve, lingered until New Year's Day and was greatly appreciated by the twitching fraternity.

The Norfolk bird was picked up freshly dead, much to the chagrin of Norfolk birders, who will now be well and truly ticked off to learn that 'their' bird was illegally killed. A post-mortem found that the bird had very recently been shot and that this had caused its death.

RSPB Senior Investigations Officer Mark Thomas said: 'Little Bustards are protected at all times of year and are the focus of intensive conservation efforts in the countries where they breed. Evidence suggests that this bird is likely to have died very close to the location where it was shot.'

### Bird observatories

Bird observatories in Britain had a fantastic year in 2014, with some amazing falls of common migrants, gripping sea passage, and their fair share of the country's biggest rarities of the year. You can read more about how the observatories fared in 2014 in the Bird Observatories Council newsletter, with images of some of the great birds seen, accounts of falls, conservation initiatives and restoration work including coming to terms with losing buildings and hides to the winter storms <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwoZpjfBovSjdXZhSDdiY0l4Q0E/view>

The newsletter also includes a full list of contact details for all the observatories. All the bird observatories that provide accommodation are now taking bookings for the 2015 season, which will no doubt have its share of highlights too.

### New county bird recorders

**Outer Hebrides** Ian Ricketts, 50 Broadmeadow, Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire WR9 8SZ (he'll be moving to Barra later this year!); tel. (07534) 085505; e-mail [recorder@outerhebridesbirds.org.uk](mailto:recorder@outerhebridesbirds.org.uk)

And, following a digital reorganisation in the midlands, there are new e-mail addresses for three of the recorders there:

Steve Haynes (Warwickshire [warks-recorder@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk](mailto:warks-recorder@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk))

Kevin Clements (West Midlands [west-mids-recorder@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk](mailto:west-mids-recorder@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk))

Steve Payne (Worcestershire [worcs-recorder@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk](mailto:worcs-recorder@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk))

COTF2015BV to donate and support the cause.

At the time of writing, donations are coming along nicely, and among those already pledged is a very generous one from the team at Rare Bird Alert.

### The 598th British bird

The 600th species milestone for the British List inches ever closer, now that BOURC has added Moltoni's Warbler *Sylvia subalpina* to Category A of the British List with the upgrade of this former race to species status, distinct from Subalpine Warbler *S. cantillans*. There are three accepted British records of Moltoni's – two on Shetland in 2009 and one on St Kilda, Outer Hebrides, in June 1894 (*Brit. Birds* 106: 651–668; 107: 621–622), with another from Fair Isle in 2014 waiting to be assessed.

The British List now stands at 598 with 580 species in Category A, eight in Category B (no records since 1950) and ten in Category C (introduced species with self-sustaining populations). Should Subalpine Warbler be further split into Eastern and Western, the list will tick over to 599. But what will be the 600th? Slaty-backed Gull *Larus schistisagus* waits in the wings, although the 50 shades of grey exhibited by this species are not helping the records committees' deliberations.

### A new online resource for ringers – and birders

In February, a new website was launched to help European ringers age and sex birds in the hand. This non-commercial site – the Ringers' DigiGuide – has been created in Sweden by Ottenby Bird Observatory, but the text is in English. The main aim of this photographic guide is to present high-quality photos of birds of all the key age and sex categories during both autumn and spring. When it was launched, 32 species were included, but this number will grow significantly during the coming months and years. This is a fantastic resource that, while it is aimed primarily at ringers, is bound to be extremely helpful for field birders in general, now that optics and digital cameras are so good. Visit the site at [www.ringersdigidiguide.ottenby.se](http://www.ringersdigidiguide.ottenby.se)



## Charity Commission rejects complaint against RSPB

The attempt by shooting syndicate owner Sir Ian Botham to deflect attention while gamekeepers were being hauled before the court for rampant raptor persecution has been predictably batted away.

His *You Forgot the Birds* campaign against the RSPB (*Brit. Birds* 107: 722–723), backed by the Countryside Alliance, alleging that Britain's biggest conservation organisation was spending 'only' £30m on its reserves from its £120m annual income, has been rejected by the Charity Commission.

In a brief statement the Society responded: 'The RSPB was not subject to a formal investigation, but the Charity Commission has invested time in examining our processes and activities in the light of the complaints. The Commission is clear that the RSPB has not breached charitable regulations or guidelines, or our own charitable objectives, on any of the issues raised.' There's more – including links to the Charity Commission findings – at [www.rspb.org.uk/news/388840-complaints-against-the-rspb-rejected?utm\\_source=rss&utm\\_medium=rss](http://www.rspb.org.uk/news/388840-complaints-against-the-rspb-rejected?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss)

## Golden-winged Warblers 'heard tornadoes coming'

American researchers are claiming that tracking data show that Golden-winged Warblers *Vermivora chrysoptera*, which had just arrived on their breeding grounds, 'evacuated' the area and flew back south just one day before tornadoes struck in April 2014.

Geolocators show that the birds left the Appalachians and flew 700 km (400 miles) south to the Gulf of Mexico, even though they had only just completed their spring migration after a 5,000-km journey from Colombia.

Writing in the journal *Current Biology*, Henry Streby *et al.* suggest that the warblers – and other species – may sense such extreme events with their keen low-frequency hearing. Working with colleagues from the Universities of Tennessee and Minnesota, Dr Streby tagged 20 Golden-winged Warblers in May 2013, in the Cumberland Mountains of northeast Tennessee. He says that he initially set out to see if tracking the warblers, which weigh only 9 g, was even possible. 'The fact that they came back with the geolocators was supposed to be the great success of this season. Then this happened!'

After wintering in Colombia, ten of the tagged warblers returned in April 2014. The monitoring

team was in the field observing them when they received advance warning of the tornadoes. 'We evacuated ourselves to the waffle house in Caryville, Tennessee,' Dr Streby said. Elsewhere in the USA the storm had more drastic consequences: at least 84 tornadoes caused 35 fatalities and more than \$1bn-worth of property damage.

After the storm had blown over, the team recaptured five of the warblers and removed the



69. Male Golden-winged Warbler *Vermivora chrysoptera*.

geolocators, which indicated that the birds had taken unprecedented evasive action, beginning 1–2 days ahead of the storm's arrival. They escaped just south of the tornadoes' path – and then went straight home again. By 2nd May, all five warblers were back in their nesting area. For more on this story see [www.cell.com/current-biology/abstract/S0960-9822\(14\)01428-6](http://www.cell.com/current-biology/abstract/S0960-9822(14)01428-6)

Photo Researchers/FLPA

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# Report on scarce migrant birds in Britain in 2011–12

## Part I: non-passerines

Steve White and Chris Kehoe

Alan Harris



American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*

**Abstract** This report presents data on the non-passerine scarce migrants recorded in Britain during 2011–12. To a large extent, the patterns illustrated here continue some long-term trends, with good numbers of most herons and their allies and Nearctic waders, while other species – Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*, Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*, White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* and Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* were genuinely rare. The year 2011 was a record one for no fewer than six species – Great White Egret *Ardea alba*, Purple Heron *A. purpurea*, Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*, Buff-breasted *Calidris subruficollis* and Pectoral Sandpipers *C. melanotos* – although the record total of American Golden Plovers lasted only one year before being eclipsed in 2012.

### Introduction

This is the twelfth report on scarce migrant birds in Britain, covering the years 2011 and 2012. Given the practicalities and logistics of data collection and analysis, these reports are now as up to date as realistically possible, and in future they will combine passerines and

non-passerines into one report for a single year.

The treatment of many species is less comprehensive than previously, if for no other reason than to avoid repetition, but in future we intend to pay greater attention to a selection of species in rotation or when there



are significant events, such as a major influx, to report. All the species accounts do, however, include the same baseline elements: summary statistics for the years in question and for previous decades, assessments of annual variation and the trends in numbers, and some comments about geographical distribution and timing of occurrence.

One new feature is a summary description of the breeding and wintering ranges of each species, bringing this report in line with the annual BBRC report; like those for the rarities report, these have been compiled by Peter Kennerley.

For this report, the distribution maps and the charts showing monthly occurrence all relate to the period 2008–12, rather than just the two years under consideration. This enables us to show a more complete picture of timing and distribution (and conveniently deals with the period since the report for 2004–07; Fraser 2013). However, for most species, the species texts deal with timing and distribution of records during the ‘current’ period of 2011–12.

The statistics in this report do not always follow precisely from those in the last report (White & Kehoe 2014). In most instances this simply relates to additional information coming to light after the last report was published, which generally increases the totals for previous years but in some cases results in a small decrease (if validated records are fewer than unvalidated totals derived from the bird information services). In almost all cases the difference is less than 1.5% of the cumulative total of records for the species in question, but for four species in this report, that difference is slightly greater – ‘Black Brant’ *Branta bernicla nigricans* (+3.4%), Great White Egret *Ardea alba* (-1.9%), Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus* (-2.3%) and Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* (+1.9%). See also Appendix 1.

Both annual variation and trends in the totals reported here have been recalculated, the former for the period 2000–12, the latter for 1990–2012. Variation has been based on the calculation of coefficients of variation<sup>1</sup>

but is expressed in purely descriptive terms using four categories: low, moderate, high and very high. Increasing or decreasing trends since 1990 are cited only if statistically significant<sup>2</sup>.

The number of records for almost all species has increased hugely over the past 50 years but during 2011 and 2012 were fairly typical of recent years: 5,497 and 4,493 records involving 10,333 and 6,548 individuals respectively.

To a large extent, most long-term increases presumably relate to the growth in the number of birders and in their knowledge of identification issues, rather than any absolute increase in the number of scarce migrants reaching Britain. Consequently, in an attempt to reduce the impact of these ‘observer effects’, trends are shown only since 1990, although this is admittedly a crude attempt to avoid observer bias and by no means eliminates it. We are in the process of preparing a short paper in which we attempt to assess the approximate magnitude of these observer-related effects by comparing historical records from observatories and elsewhere. For the moment, though, it is simply not possible to quantify observer effort with any degree of accuracy. It is, however, safe to assume that species showing any decline in records over the past 20 years are declining in real terms, while apparently stable species and some of those showing only moderate increases may also in reality be declining. There are a handful of species where upward trends undoubtedly reflect a genuine increase in the numbers reaching our shores – the most obvious examples include Cattle *Bubulcus ibis* and Great White Egrets and, from the passerines, Yellow-browed Warblers *Phylloscopus inornatus*.

Throughout this report, when we refer to ‘records’ these relate to individual birds unless stated otherwise. Where possible, only new birds have been included in the totals and those sightings thought to relate to birds returning from previous years or seen elsewhere in the same year (mostly in the same recording area) have been omitted. This

<sup>1</sup> The mean number of individuals recorded divided by their standard deviation and expressed as a percentage.

<sup>2</sup> At the 5% level as tested by linear or polynomial regression analysis.



applies almost entirely to non-passerines. In particular, the wildfowl and some of the larger waterbirds in this report present great difficulties in terms of giving precise and accurate national totals. These species are frequently long-lived, highly visible and mobile – and the extent to which they move between sites and recording areas means that a degree of judgement is used to derive the figures. The issue of provenance adds a further veneer of complexity to the process, but records of escaped and feral birds and hybrids have also been excluded where possible.

Records were received from 73 of the country’s 79 recording areas for both 2011 and 2012. None was received for one of the two years from Staffordshire, the West

Midlands, the Isle of Man, Ayrshire or Caithness. For these areas, reports from BirdGuides ([www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com)) were used for the missing years, using only those records that appeared likely to have been confirmed (for instance those reported for more than one day), although for the two Scottish counties rarer species are helpfully covered by the reports of the Scottish Birds Records Committee (McGowan *et al.* 2013, 2014). More significantly, nothing was received from Dorset for 2012 but the comprehensive blog produced by the Dorset Bird Club proved very helpful. In all these cases, unvalidated one-day records of the rarer species, together with those of flyovers, were excluded from the analysis.

‘Black Brant’ *Branta bernicla nigricans*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
325	18 (8)	12 (12)	2006 & 2008/31/1= 2002/24/3	Increase, then more stable	Moderate

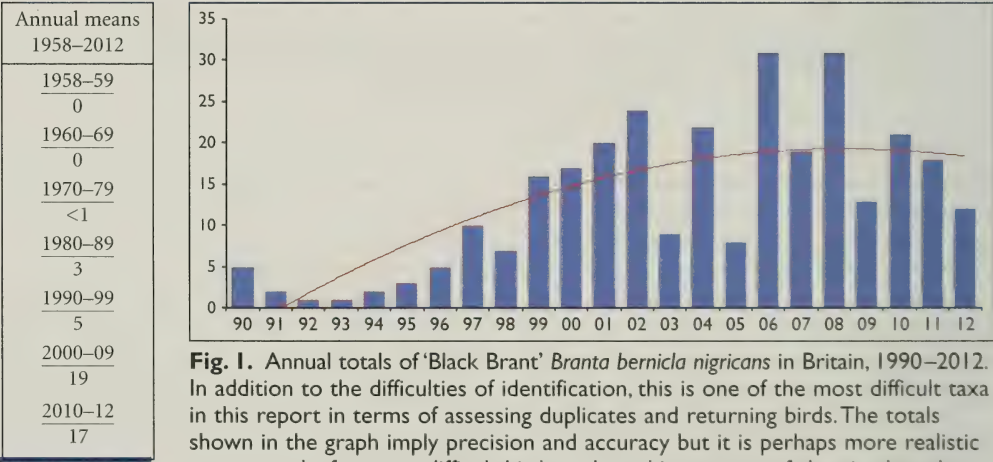


Fig. 1. Annual totals of ‘Black Brant’ *Branta bernicla nigricans* in Britain, 1990–2012. In addition to the difficulties of identification, this is one of the most difficult taxa in this report in terms of assessing duplicates and returning birds. The totals shown in the graph imply precision and accuracy but it is perhaps more realistic to use graphs for more difficult birds such as this as a way of showing broad-scale trends and patterns.

Once again a high proportion of the 71 birds reported (41, 58%) were thought likely to have been returning individuals. In addition to these, several birds included in the annual totals may conceivably have been recorded in more than one county. No juveniles/first-winters were reported in either year.

One on North Uist (Outer Hebrides) on 20th April 2012, with five pale-bellied Brent Geese *B. b. hrota*, was the only Scottish record, while one at Whiteford NNR (Gower) on 13th November to 20th December 2011 remains under consideration by the Welsh Records Panel at the time of writing. All others were seen on the English coast between Dorset and Lincolnshire.

Most Black Brants in Britain are assumed to originate from the Siberian population, migrating with dark-bellied Brent Geese *B. b. bernicla*, although those wintering in Ireland



usually associate with ‘high Arctic’ pale-bellied Brent Geese, which breed in northern Canada. So the North Uist bird – one of very few records ever on the Scottish west coast – may perhaps have had a North American origin.

(Breeds Arctic NE Siberia W to Lena delta, where overlaps with nominate race. Majority breed low-Arctic North America from N & W Alaska, E through parts of N coast Canada. Migratory, wintering locally on Pacific Coast from Alaska south to S Baja California, and coastal N China, Korean Peninsula & Japan, where now rare.)

American Wigeon *Anas americana*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
505	28 (2)	7 (28)	2000/31/1	1998/27/3	Stable	Moderate

Annual means 1958–2012
<u>1958–59</u> 1
<u>1960–69</u> 1
<u>1970–79</u> 4
<u>1980–89</u> 8
<u>1990–99</u> 15
<u>2000–09</u> 17
<u>2010–12</u> 15

The year 2011 was outstanding, while 2012 proved to be the worst since 1994. However, no first-winter birds were reported in 2011, compared with three in 2012 and nine during 2008–10, so it is possible that the number of returning birds (eight) was underestimated. Since only one female was reported during the two years, however, the real numbers present are likely to have been significantly higher. The North American population was estimated at more than two million birds in 2012 and thought to be stable (Zimpfer *et al.* 2012).

With the exception of two in Herefordshire and singles in Nottinghamshire and Oxfordshire, all records came from coastal counties. Birds were seen in 20 recording areas, distributed in a broadly similar pattern to that of recent years, which, rather surprisingly, shows only a slight bias towards western Britain (fig. 2).

Three were found during the summer months in 2011 – in North-east Scotland, Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. The origins of such birds are perhaps in doubt, although this species breeds in parts of Canada that are at roughly the same latitude as Britain and so they are included here.

(Breeds C Alaska E across temperate Canada to Quebec & Nova Scotia, & S into NW & Midwest USA. Winters S Alaska, coastal British Columbia, Canada and S throughout southern USA & C America to Colombia, Greater Antillies & West Indies.)



70. Male American Wigeon *Anas americana*, Cley, Norfolk, January 2011.

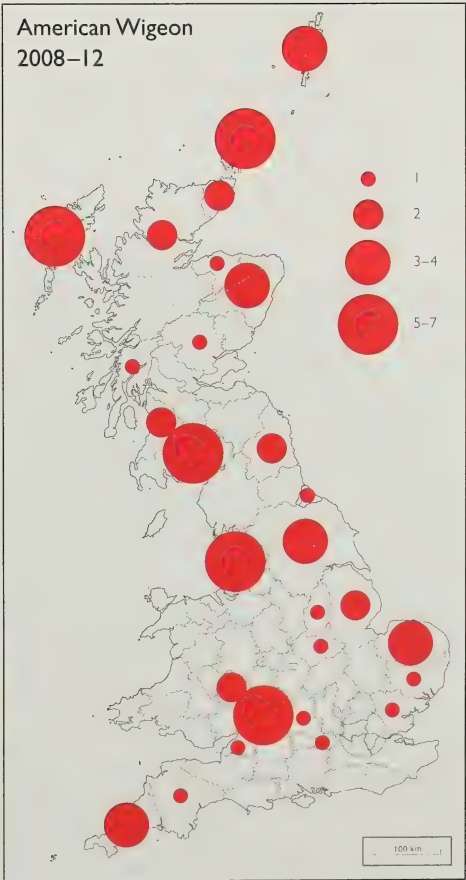


Fig. 2. Distribution of American Wigeons *Anas americana* in Britain, 2008–12.



Green-winged Teal *Anas carolinensis*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
982	35 (11)	29 (15)	2004/60/1	2002/59/2	Increase	Low

Annual means 1958–2012
1958–59
1
1960–69
3
1970–79
6
1980–89
12
1990–99
23
2000–09
45
2010–12
30

In total, 144 Green-winged Teals were recorded during 2011–12, all of them males, but 80 of those were thought to have been returning birds seen in previous years, hence 64 (44%) new arrivals. The comparable figures for 2008–10 were 237 records with 115 ‘new’ (49%). Making that judgement involves a level of subjectivity, however, which in turn has an effect on the statistics. Only one definite first-winter was seen in 2011–12, at Slimbridge (Gloucestershire) in December 2012. In North America, the Green-winged Teal population was estimated at 3.5 million individuals in 2012, 74% more than the 1955–2011 average (Zimpfer *et al.* 2012), so an increase in vagrants to Britain might be expected.

Birds were seen in 33 recording areas and included 15 ‘new arrivals’ in Scotland but none in Wales; peak county totals were eight in Yorkshire and four in Norfolk.

(Widespread breeder throughout North America from Alaska to Newfoundland, S to N USA. Winters southernmost Canada, throughout USA & Mexico to southern C America & West Indies.)

Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
716	12 (26)	24 (11)	2001/52/1	2002/42/2	Stabilising after increase	Low

Annual means 1958–2012
1958–59
1
1960–69
1
1970–79
8
1980–89
13
1990–99
13
2000–09
32
2010–12
16



Gary Thoburn

71. First-winter male and two first-winter female Ring-necked Ducks *Aythya collaris*, St Mary’s, Scilly, October 2012.

In all, 99 Ring-necked Ducks were reported over the two years but almost two-thirds were regarded as returning birds. Although the numbers recorded appeared to increase sharply during the 2000s, it is thus unclear whether the number of new arrivals has in reality changed much over the past 20–30 years (or whether occurrence patterns and identification of presumed returnees are treated somewhat differently). Only six of those seen in 2011–12 were aged as immatures.

Ring-necked Ducks were seen throughout Britain, including 11 in Scotland but only one in Wales. Most sightings were of singles, the exceptions being two drakes at various sites in Dorset



and at Chard Reservoir in Somerset in December 2011, and three together on Scilly from October 2012 into 2013 (plate 71).

(Breeds locally E Alaska, throughout cool temperate Canada from S Yukon to Maritime Provinces, and N USA from Washington to Maine. Winters in ice-free regions of southernmost Canada, S throughout southern USA to S Mexico, Costa Rica & Greater Antilles.)

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*

Total 1986–2012	No. 2011 (rank/27)	No. 2012 (rank/27)	Other annual maxima 1986–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
318	11 (13)	7 (21)	1987/27/1	1986/20/2	Uncertain	Moderate

Annual means 1986–2012
<u>1986–89</u> 18
<u>1990–99</u> 11
<u>2000–09</u> 12
<u>2010–12</u> 7

Dealing with the issue of provenance continues to cloud the analysis of records of this species to an unknown extent. Unless a bird is ringed or obviously tame, it is extremely difficult to judge its origin. It seems likely that different records committees treat the problem in somewhat different ways, ranging from simply publishing all records to acknowledged scepticism. Nineteen records were judged to have involved returning birds, whittling the number down to 18 from the 37 reported. The large total – by recent standards at least – in 2011 included four new arrivals in Suffolk, three aged as either juvenile or first-winter.

The world breeding population is declining and the Ferruginous Duck’s status is classified as Vulnerable in Europe (BirdLife International 2014), suggesting that wild birds are genuinely rare in Britain, perhaps even more so

than the current ten-year mean of 9.7 suggests.

Birds included here were recorded in ten counties in the southern half of England and one in Wales, a bird in Cardiff (East Glamorgan) on 6th April 2012. One was seen on 23rd–29th July 2011 at Paxton Pits (Cambridgeshire), with the remainder between October and early April.

(Breeds S Spain, Poland & Hungary E through Ukraine to Caspian Sea, but distribution patchy. Elsewhere breeds Kazakhstan, W Mongolia & Tibetan Plateau. Migratory, most winter E Mediterranean, Black & Caspian Seas, NE Africa & Indian subcontinent.)



Gary Thoburn

72. Male Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*, Lydiard Park, Wiltshire, April 2011.



Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
552	15 (15)	16 (12)	2003/30/1	1999/26/2	Stable	Low

Annual means 1958–2012
1958–59
1
1960–69
2
1970–79
6
1980–89
12
1990–99
13
2000–09
18
2010–12
13

A little more than half of the 65 birds reported in 2011–12 were thought to have been seen in previous winters, although the real number of returnees is most likely to have been somewhat higher. Seven juveniles or first-winters were seen over the two years.

In terms of the new arrivals, there were 17 records off the west and east coasts of Scotland. Elsewhere, two new birds were seen in Wales, six in south-west England, three in Norfolk and singles in Yorkshire, Durham and Northumberland. The largest total at a single location (including probable returning birds) was up to six at the scoter hotspot of Blackdog/Murcar (North-east Scotland) between June and September 2012.

(Breeds coastal Alaska from Kotzebue Sound to Alaska Peninsula, & Canada from Mackenzie River delta S to S Yukon, NE British Columbia, C Alberta, N Saskatchewan, N Manitoba, E to C Quebec & Labrador. Winters on coast from S Alaska S to Baja California, Mexico, and Canadian Maritime Provinces S to Texas Gulf coast, USA.)

White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
438	20 (7)	22 (4=)	2008/33/1	2007/29/2	Increase	Moderate

Annual means 1958–2012
1958–59
1
1960–69
1
1970–79
4
1980–89
6
1990–99
8
2000–09
18
2010–12
21

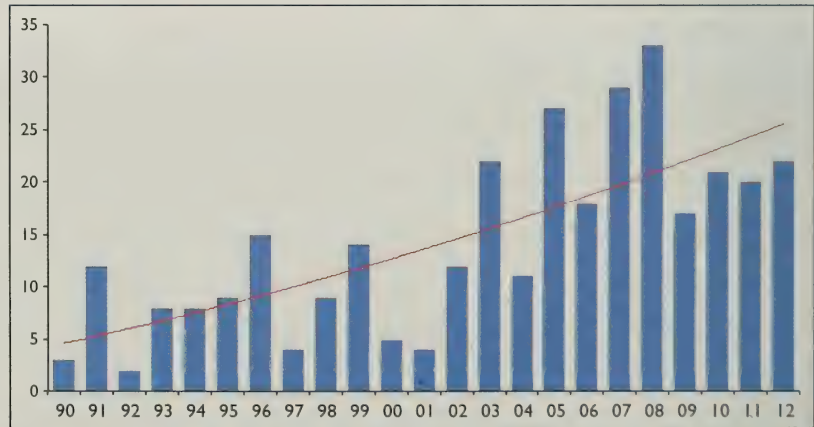


Fig. 3. Annual totals of White-billed Divers *Gavia adamsii* in Britain, 1990–2012.

The number of records has more than doubled during this century, perhaps largely due to increased observer effort (fig. 3), particularly in northern Scotland (see, for example, <http://birdingfrontiers.com/2013/05/06/white-billed-diver-discovery/>). Away from the coasts of the far north, just four singles were discovered:

- Whitburn, Co. Durham, 12th March 2011
- Calf of Man, Isle of Man, 20th March 2011
- Strumble Head, Pembrokeshire, 1st September 2011 (the third Welsh record and first since 1999)
- Flamborough, Yorkshire, 25th October 2012





Alan Harris

White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*

The Scottish totals must include a number of returning birds but identifying these is extremely difficult. Of the presumed new birds, 14 were in Orkney, seven in Moray & Nairn, five in both North-east Scotland and the Outer Hebrides, four in Highland, two in Shetland and one in Argyll. As in previous years, more than half of all records were in the period from March to May, coinciding with the species' complete pre-breeding moult when birds are flightless for a time, and perhaps when some birds seek more sheltered conditions, within range of land-based observers.

(Breeds along Arctic coasts of European Russia from Yamal Peninsula & Novaya Zemlya E through Arctic coastal regions of Siberia, N Alaska, & Canada E to Melville Peninsula, Nunavut. Winters at sea in E Atlantic S to S Norway, & ice-free N Pacific S to N British Columbia and N Japan. Some winter inland in North America.)

Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
28,269	1,550 (8)	399 (14)	1998/5,116/1 1999/2,295/2	None	Very high

Annual means 1958–2012
1958–59 0
1960–69 17
1970–79 18
1980–89 453
1990–99 1,519
2000–09 623
2010–12 656

Counts of Cory's Shearwaters are best regarded as referring to bird-days as it is effectively impossible to keep track of the number of individuals involved. The largest counts were 800 off Porthgwarra on 6th July 2011, when 155 were also recorded off Land's End, a further 125 off Bass Point (all Cornwall), and 137 off Deep Point, St Mary's (Scilly). Other three-figure totals from Scilly were 107 off St Agnes on 18th July 2011 and 120 from the same island on 3rd August 2012, when 115 were also seen off Porthgwarra.

As ever, the vast majority of birds were seen in southwest England, primarily from the main seawatching venues in Cornwall, and most of the remainder off Scilly and from vessels in sea areas Sole and Plymouth. A handful of ones and twos were seen in autumn in other English coastal counties, in Kent, Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Lincolnshire, Yorkshire, Cleveland, Co. Durham and Northumberland. The only Scottish record was one at Dunbar (Lothian) on 17th September 2011, but there were three in Wales: singles off Strumble Head (Pembrokeshire) in July and August 2011, and one off Porthcawl (East Glamorgan) on 7th August 2011.

Most were in July and August, with 31 records in September and just nine in October, the latest being on 23rd in 2011. Most of those recorded in September, and all of those in October, were in the North Sea. One off Selsey Bill (Sussex) on 21st April 2012 was a very unusual spring record.

(Breeds E North Atlantic in Canary Islands, Madeira, Selvagens, Desertas, Azores and other islands. Disperses widely N to S Ireland, S England, and E to coastal NE USA and Canadian Maritime Provinces. Winters S to South Atlantic.)

Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
691	28 (10)	13 (16)	1988/103/1	2009/75/2	Uncertain	High

Annual means 1958–2012
<u>1958–59</u> 0
<u>1960–69</u> 0
<u>1970–79</u> 0
<u>1980–89</u> 19
<u>1990–99</u> 6
<u>2000–09</u> 38
<u>2010–12</u> 19

All records came from southwest England and only two were seen from land: off Porthgwarra on 8th July 2011 and Pendeen Watch on 12th September 2011 (both Cornwall).

There is potentially some degree of duplication of records seen from ferries and on pelagic trips in the waters around Scilly, where ‘chumming’



Simon Stirrup

73. Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*, off Scilly, July 2012.

attracts birds to boats from some distance – and so, like those for Cory’s Shearwater, the totals are best regarded as bird-days rather than accurate counts of individuals. Most were recorded in sea area Sole, where the largest day-count was five on 8th September 2011, while just two were in sea area Plymouth. Over the two years records were spread between 1st June and 12th September.

(Breeds on rocky coastline & offshore islands of Antarctic. Migrates N to winter throughout southern oceans, along E seaboard of North America N to Newfoundland, Canada, & E to Bay of Biscay in W Europe.)

Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
566	16 (7)	14 (11)	1990/61/1	1987/53/2	Stable	High

Annual means 1958–2012
<u>1958–59</u> 1
<u>1960–69</u> 3
<u>1970–79</u> 6
<u>1980–89</u> 13
<u>1990–99</u> 18
<u>2000–09</u> 12
<u>2010–12</u> 11

Of the 44 birds reported in the period, five were definite escapes. One in Warwickshire had escaped from Twycross Zoo, while two free-flying birds remained at Edinburgh Zoo during 2012 and another two were at Galloway Conservation Park (Kirkcudbright). In November 2011, one of the latter walked into a house where it was caught and taken to Stranraer police station! Although the issue of provenance is still a live one, the remaining records are treated as wild birds, though nine had previously been recorded at another site and thus are not included twice. The most recent ten-year mean (2003–12) is 13, inflated somewhat by a total of 36 in 2006.

Although the species is increasing in the Netherlands, the Dutch birds are thought to be derived mainly, if not entirely, from escaped birds (van Turnhout *et al.* 2010). It is possible that some proportion of British migrants arrive here from the Netherlands, and are thus not of wild origin. The Night Heron is declining as a breeding bird in France (Marion 2009).

Night Herons were seen in 18 recording areas during 2011–12, all in



England with the exception of one found dead on St Kilda (Outer Hebrides) in March 2012. Three adults and an ‘immature’ arrived at Woolacombe (Devon) on 12th March 2012 and accounted for a series of records in that county until 15th April. Four adults and a first-summer were also seen at various sites in Cornwall from 12th to 29th March 2012; the dates rule out any overlap with the Devon birds so it appears that there was an influx into the southwest in that month. The only other multiple record concerned two juveniles at Stodmarsh (Kent) and nearby sites from 29th June to 1st August 2011.

(Widespread but local throughout Mediterranean basin & N to France, Belgium & the Netherlands. Elsewhere, breeds Morocco, Ukraine, Turkey & throughout Indian subcontinent & SE Asia N to Japan, & locally throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Widespread North & South America.)

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
693	57 (5)	25 (7)	2008/189/1    2007/102/2	Large increase	Very high

Annual means 1958–2012
<u>1958–59</u> 0
<u>1960–69</u> 1
<u>1970–79</u> 1
<u>1980–89</u> 3
<u>1990–99</u> 6
<u>2000–09</u> 46
<u>2010–12</u> 46

After the unprecedented influxes during 2007–09, new arrivals appear to have stabilised, albeit at a higher level than at any time previously. The prospect of colonisation after the first successful breeding in Britain in 2008 has not (yet) been fulfilled, however.

Birds were seen in 24 counties, but no fewer than 72 of the total of 82 were in southern England. There were three Scottish records – Lewis (Outer Hebrides) on 29th September 2011, Mull (Argyll) on 27th October 2011 and Corpach (Highland) on 22nd September 2012 – while singles at Penclacwydd (Carmarthenshire) on 2nd July 2011 and Sunk Island (Yorkshire) on 7th November 2011 were the only records in Wales and northern England. Five in the Midlands included three at Clay Mills (Staffordshire) on 22nd February 2011, the others being singles in Shropshire and Warwickshire.

None was seen in June but records were spread fairly evenly throughout all other months.

(Common & widespread S Spain & Portugal, expanding N in France. N populations disperse outside breeding season, mostly into Africa. Widespread resident throughout much of Africa, S USA, and N & C South America.)

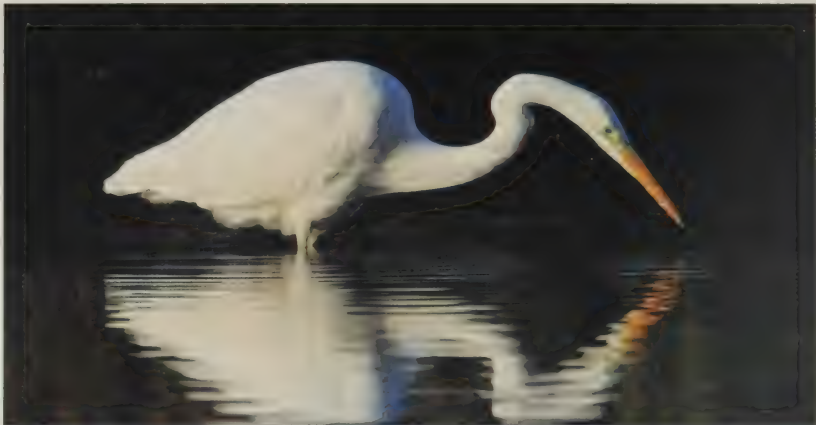
Great White Egret *Ardea alba*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
1,088	156 (1)	125 (4)	2009/153/2    2010/138/3	Large increase	High

Although it is likely that a number of records included here involve birds seen in a previous year and/or in different recording areas, there is no doubt that the recent major increase is continuing apace, in contrast to the situation for Cattle Egrets. Two pairs bred in Somerset in 2012 and records of this now largely resident population, which peaked at eight on the Avalon Marshes in February 2012, have been excluded.

Great White Egrets were seen in 56 recording areas, over 70% of the total, including ten birds in six areas of Scotland and 17 in eight Welsh counties. The highest totals over the two years were 32 in Suffolk, 26 in Kent and 25 in Norfolk; 12 in Gloucestershire and ten in Cornwall were the highest in the southwest. Away from Somerset the largest counts were five at Frampton Court Lake (Gloucestershire) on 26th October 2011 and five at Iken Cliff (Suffolk) on 20th September 2011.

Annual means 1958–2012
<u>1958–59</u>
0
<u>1960–69</u>
0
<u>1970–79</u>
1
<u>1980–89</u>
2
<u>1990–99</u>
7
<u>2000–09</u>
55
<u>2010–12</u>
139



Mark Caunt

74. Great White Egret *Ardea alba*, Balnamoon, Angus & Dundee, December 2011.

Birds were seen in every month of the year but most frequently during the winter.

(Increasing in Europe, particularly the Netherlands & France. Breeding range from E Austria to Ukraine fragmented & generally rare. Migratory, most wintering N Africa & E Mediterranean, although increasingly common C & NW Europe. Other populations breed Africa, Asia, Australia & the Americas.)

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
963	41 (1)	17 (29)	1987/35/2 1999 & 2006/32/3=	Stable	Low

Annual means 1958–2012
<u>1958–59</u>
5
<u>1960–69</u>
7
<u>1970–79</u>
19
<u>1980–89</u>
21
<u>1990–99</u>
20
<u>2000–09</u>
19
<u>2010–12</u>
27

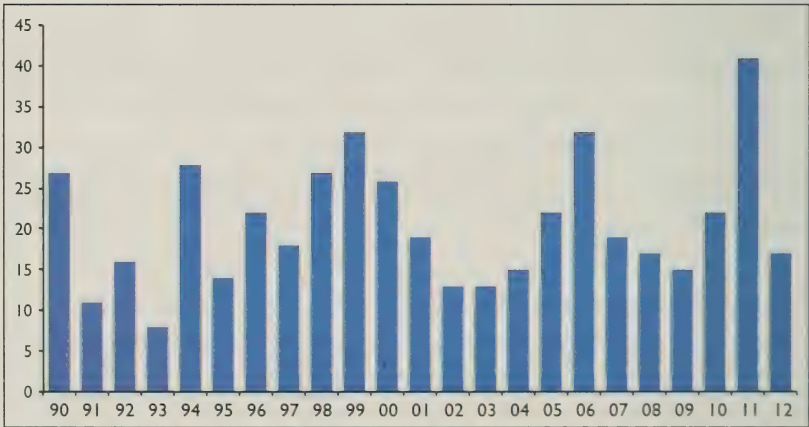


Fig. 4. Annual totals of Purple Herons *Ardea purpurea* in Britain, 1990–2012.

Despite successful breeding in 2008, and a record total to report from 2011, Purple Heron numbers have shown no consistent change in Britain for 20 or more years (fig. 4): colonisation still seems some way off.

As usual, most were seen in spring (42 between late March and June), with a smaller peak in autumn (15 between July and November). The one winter bird, at Spurn (Yorkshire) on 11th January 2011, was also seen on the Lincolnshire side of the Humber. Such records, in the depths of winter, are very unusual in Britain.

Where ages were recorded, 12 birds in spring were reported as second calendar-years and the same number as adults, while in autumn there were ten juveniles and just a single adult. In 2011–12, records were spread fairly evenly in 27 recording areas throughout (mainly southern) Britain



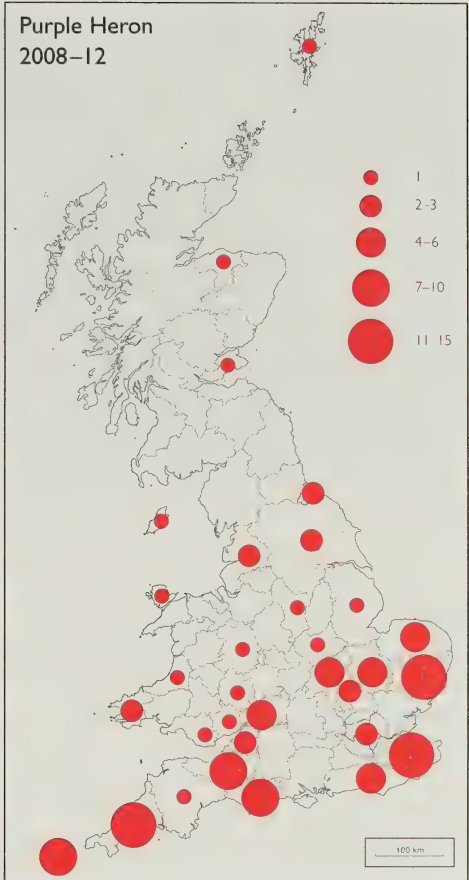
but with a typical concentration of ten in Kent, half of them at Dungeness. Fig. 5 shows the distribution in the last five years, 2008–12.

(Breeds throughout S Europe from S Spain locally N to the Netherlands & E to S Russia, Iran, & C Asia to Kazakhstan. Winters sub-Saharan Africa. Other resident races in S & SE Asia.)



Graham Catley

**75.** First-summer Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*, Huttoft, Lincolnshire, April 2011.



**Fig 5.** Distribution of Purple Herons *Ardea purpurea* in Britain, 2008–12.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
1,096	23 (18)	71 (2)	2004/77/1	2005/67/3	Increase	High

Annual means 1958–2012
<u>1958–59</u> 0
<u>1960–69</u> 3
<u>1970–79</u> 16
<u>1980–89</u> 15
<u>1990–99</u> 21
<u>2000–09</u> 43
<u>2010–12</u> 40

Confusion over provenance and the duplication of records between counties makes it more or less impossible to paint an accurate national picture. Of the 250 that were reported in 2011–12, 156 were discounted either because they had been reported previously or because their bona fides were in doubt; 62 of these were regarded by county recorders as definite escapes or of dubious origin, and 17 as having been seen previously in other counties.

Unfortunately, definitive evidence (rings or behaviour) of captive or released origin, such as one in Essex in May 2012 that was described as ‘so tame that schoolchildren were able to touch it’, is rarely available. Many records are taken at face value but in some areas they are treated more cautiously. For example, of the 24 recorded in Yorkshire only four were regarded as ‘probably OK’, and in much of northwest England all are generally treated as being free-flying escapes from Harewood House in West Yorkshire, although one carrying sticks near Dalston Zoo (Cumbria) in April 2012 may point to yet another origin.

The situation in Scotland, where only three were recorded, and Wales (seven

Mark Rayment



76. White Storks *Ciconia ciconia*, Portland, Dorset, May 2012.

records) may be less fraught, but in most parts of England assessment of wild birds is largely subjective. Small flocks are usually considered to have better credentials. During 2011–12 there were 11 records of two and 14 reports of three or more. The largest of these was a group of nine at Abberley (Worcestershire) on 17th April 2012, while four were seen at various sites in Somerset between 24th May and 17th August 2012. Other multiple records in 2012 hint at the extent of potential duplication between counties. Six at Cefn Coleshill (Flintshire) on 22nd–23rd April may have been the same as those at Cholsey/Standlake (Oxfordshire) from 26th April to 1st May. Five over Littlehampton (Sussex) on 2nd May were probably the same as those reported at various sites in Hampshire during 2nd–17th May, and perhaps also at Portland (Dorset) on 5th May. Four appear to have moved from Herefordshire to Gwent and then Avon in June 2012, and may have been the same flock seen flying over Aston and Redmires Reservoir (Yorkshire) earlier in the month, and over Lakenheath Fen (Suffolk) on 28th May.

As a consequence of the large-scale reintroduction projects in France, the Netherlands and Germany, and a general spread of White Storks across northwestern Europe, we can perhaps expect more headaches and no diminution of the issues about provenance.

(Breeds Iberian Peninsula & temperate E Europe E to W Russia, Turkey & Iran. Reintroduction projects are returning species to former range in NW Europe & these are likely source of some British records. Winters sub-Saharan Africa & increasingly in Iberian Peninsula.)

Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus*

Total 1986–2012	No. 2011 (rank/27)	No. 2012 (rank/27)	Other annual maxima 1986–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
6,256	127 (15)	93 (20)	2000/2,188/1    2008/795/2	Increase, now uncertain	Very high

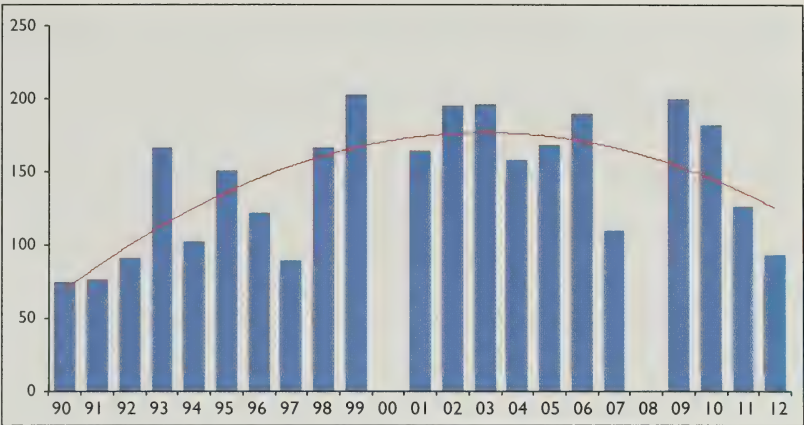
Annual means 1986–2012
1986–89 61
1990–99 125
2000–09 437
2010–12 134

The influxes of 2000 and 2008 dwarfed the numbers seen in typical years; when these two years are excluded, the average annual total since 2000 becomes a more modest 172 and an underlying trend of steady increase throughout the 1990s followed by approximate stability – or perhaps even a slight decline – since 2000 is revealed (fig. 6).

Honey-buzzards were seen in 43 recording areas during 2011–12, more than half the British total. Away from the breeding areas, however, the species remains very scarce in Scotland, where there were 11 records in seven areas, and also in Wales (three in three counties). The east coast of England accounted for almost 60% of the total, led by 113 in Kent and 76 in Yorkshire.



Spring records (April to June) were essentially similar to those in the last few years with 61 in 2011 and 31 in 2012. These included seven April records – including Northumberland’s first ever in that month, at Beal on the



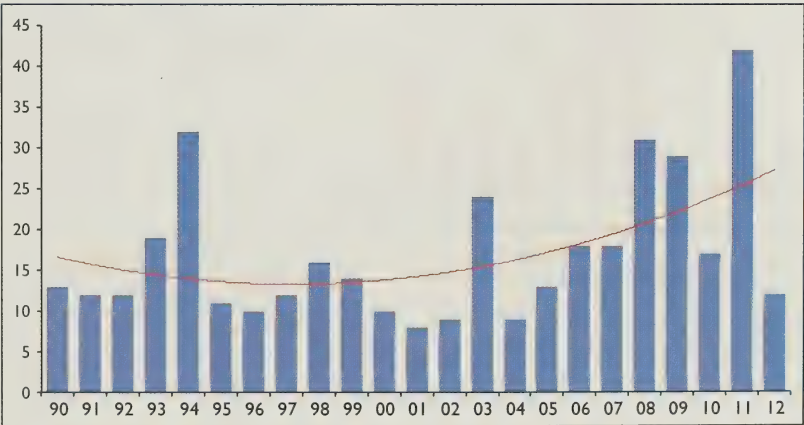
**Fig. 6.** Annual totals of Honey-buzzards *Pernis apivorus* in Britain, 1990–2012, excluding the influx years of 2000 and 2008. 24th in 2011 – all of them in the last ten days with the exception of one at North Fambridge (Essex) on 18th April 2011. Autumn numbers were similar, with 66 in 2011 and 62 in 2012. A late bird was at Bough Beech Reservoir (Kent) on 31st October 2011.

(Breeds throughout Europe from Spain to C Finland, & E in C Russia to c. 90°E. Winters sub-Saharan Africa.)

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
524	42 (1)	12 (17)	1994/32/2    2008/31/3	Recent increase	High

Annual means 1958–2012
1958–59
0
1960–69
0
1970–79
3
1980–89
10
1990–99
15
2000–09
17
2010–12
24



**Fig. 7.** Annual totals of Black Kites *Milvus migrans* in Britain, 1990–2012.

Record numbers were seen in 2011 but the following year was no better than average. However, the annual totals show a steady upturn in the last decade or so (fig. 7).

As expected, most were seen along the south coast of England, notably ten in Cornwall, eight in Kent and six on Scilly, but this species is apparently becoming a little more regular farther north, with six recorded in Scotland in 2011–12 and four in Yorkshire. Two were seen in Wales (East Glamorgan and Pembrokeshire) and four in inland counties of England (Surrey, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Leicestershire & Rutland). Three were seen on Scilly on 16th–17th October 2011 (plate 77) and two at Polgigga (Cornwall) on 14th–29th September 2011; the rest were singles.

Simon Stirrup



77. Black Kites *Milvus migrans*, St Mary's, Scilly, October 2011.

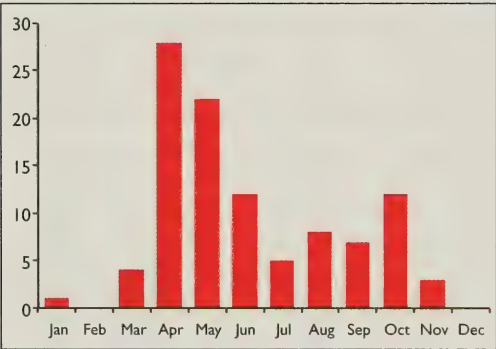


Fig. 8. Arrival dates of Black Kites *Milvus migrans* in Britain by month, 2008–12.

To E, breeds European Russia to W Kazakhstan. Most winter Africa. Other races occur in C & E Asia, Indian subcontinent, E & SE Asia & Australia.)

The earliest was at All Hallows (Kent) on 29th March 2011 and a further 30 were seen in spring, mostly in May. A somewhat higher proportion than usual turned up in autumn, and the four records in October and one in November – at Portland (Dorset) on 6th November 2011 – were unusual. Most Black Kites have left Europe by mid September so, although there may have been some duplication in these records, this late influx into the southwest is notable.

(Nominate race breeds throughout Mediterranean basin & continental Europe except maritime NW & Scandinavia, with most in Spain, France & Germany.

Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*

Total 1986–2012	No. 2011 (rank/27)	No. 2012 (rank/27)	Other annual maxima 1986–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
1,774	184 (2)	81 (6)	1994/255/1	2010/150/3	Increase	High

The distribution of Rough-legged Buzzards is typically highly concentrated along the English east coast from Suffolk to Yorkshire (see fig. 9), and during 2011–12 this area accounted for 191 (of 265) records with no fewer than 120 in Norfolk alone. In contrast, just 12 were seen in Scotland and only one in Wales, at Cemlyn Bay (Anglesey) on 12th December 2012. Where age was reported, 50 were identified as juveniles, three as third calendar-years and just 15 as adults.

The North American race *B. l. sanctijohannis* has reached Iceland, the Faeroe Islands and the



Annual means 1986–2012
<u>1986–89</u>
47
<u>1990–99</u>
73
<u>2000–09</u>
44
<u>2010–12</u>
138

Azores but has not yet occurred in Britain in the wild. Rough-legged Buzzards seen in northern or western Britain are worthy of a second look.

(Circumpolar low Arctic breeding range from mountains of S Scandinavia, E through N Scandinavia, Russia E & S to Kamchatka, Alaska & N Canada E to Newfoundland. Winters to S of breeding range.)

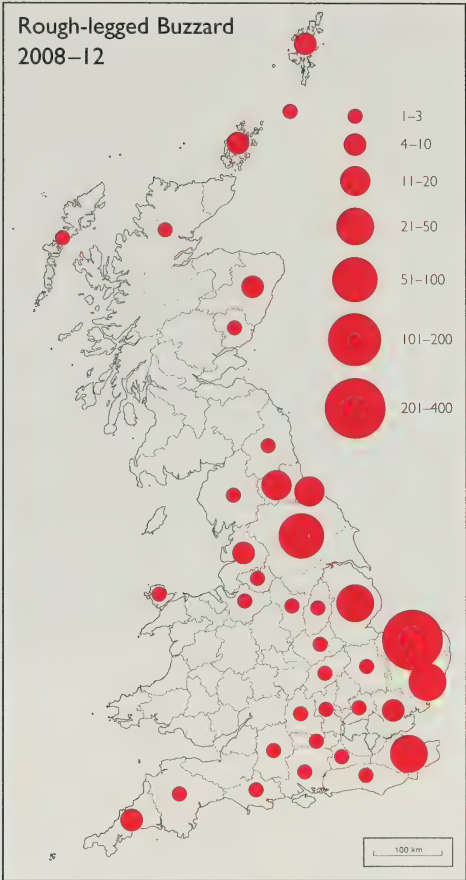


Fig. 9. Distribution of Rough-legged Buzzards *Buteo lagopus* in Britain, 2008–12.



78. Juvenile Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*, Gedling Pit Top, Nottinghamshire, December 2011.

Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana*

Total 1986–2012	No. 2011 (rank/27)	No. 2012 (rank/27)	Other annual maxima 1986–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
1,476	23 (26)	35 (23)	1995/119/1	1989/84/2	Decline	Moderate

Annual means 1986–2012
<u>1986–89</u>
72
<u>1990–99</u>
60
<u>2000–09</u>
51
<u>2010–12</u>
26

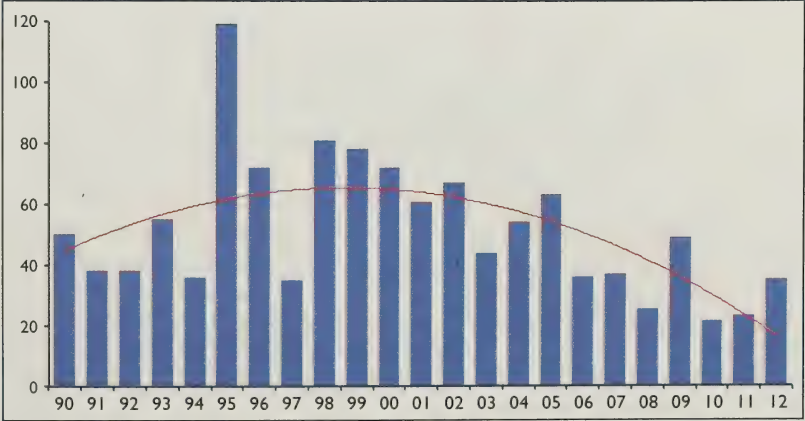


Fig. 10. Annual totals of Spotted Crakes *Porzana porzana* in Britain, 1990–2012.

Gary Thoburn



79. Spotted Crane *Porzana porzana*, Greylake RSPB reserve, Somerset, September 2012.

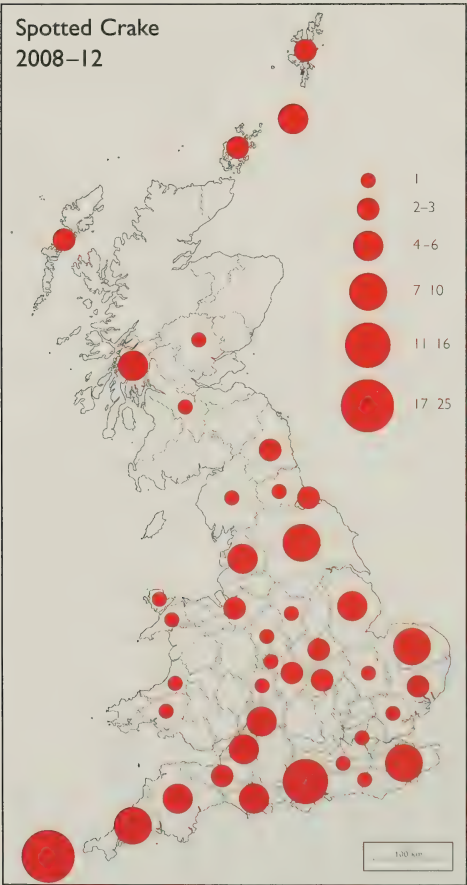


Fig. 11. Distribution of Spotted Cranes *Porzana porzana* in Britain, 2008–12.

Just how accurate the figures for migrant Spotted Cranes are is very much open to question. While probable breeding birds are excluded here, those singing for a day or two are included. Although it is possible that the recent decline in numbers of migrants may be a result of a change in the interpretation of this species' breeding status, it does appear that, after increasing between the mid 1990s and mid 2000s, numbers are now in decline (fig. 10); and 2011 and 2012 were two of the poorest years on record.

Typically, sightings were between March and October, with most in August and September, at wetland sites throughout England and Scotland. Indeed, observers and patch-workers at inland sites have an almost equal opportunity of discovering this species as those covering well-watched coastal locations. The largest totals during the two years in question were nine on Scilly and five in Argyll; fig. 11 shows the distribution during the period 2008–12.

Most autumn reports did not specify the bird's age, but ten were reported as juveniles or 'immatures' and three as adults.

(Breeds locally in Europe from S Spain & Atlantic regions of coastal France to N Gulf of Bothnia, Finland, E in C Russia to c. 100°E. Some winter Mediterranean basin, others in sub-Saharan Africa & Indian subcontinent.)



American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
465	29 (2)	42 (1)	2007/27/3 2008 & 2009/25/4=	Large increase	Moderate

Annual means 1958–2012
<u>1958–59</u> <1
<u>1960–69</u> <1
<u>1970–79</u> 3
<u>1980–89</u> 7
<u>1990–99</u> 10
<u>2000–09</u> 17
<u>2010–12</u> 30

The recent dramatic increase in British records continued during 2011 and 2012, which were the two best-ever years. This contrasts with an apparent decline in the North American population, which is around 500,000 individuals (Andres *et al.* 2012), although the long-term trend there is unknown. Birds from the tiny Russian breeding population of 100 or so pairs (Brazil 2009) seem unlikely to figure significantly in the British totals.

Once again Scotland dominated the map for this species, with 35 records in the two years, including 20 in the Outer Hebrides and seven in Orkney. Seven were seen in Wales (including three on Skokholm, Pembrokeshire, during 16th–21st September 2012), 12 in eastern England, ten in the southwest and six in the northwest. There were three records from inland counties: two in Cambridgeshire and one in Oxfordshire.

A wintering bird was in Cornwall in February 2012 but otherwise timing was similar to that in recent years with the majority arriving in September, October and into November. Of these, 23 were reported as adults or first-summerers and 35 as juveniles, proportionately more juveniles than during 2008–10.

(Breeds on coastal tundra from extreme NE Siberia, E across N Alaska & Canada to Baffin Island. Migrates over W Atlantic to wintering grounds in S South America.)

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

Total 1986–2012	No. 2011 (rank/27)	No. 2012 (rank/27)	Other annual maxima 1986–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
715	14 (24)	11 (25)	1993/59/1 1991 & 1999/42/2=	Decline	Low

Annual means 1986–2012
<u>1986–89</u> 28
<u>1990–99</u> 36
<u>2000–09</u> 20
<u>2010–12</u> 13

All 25 records have been treated as new arrivals (and totals for 2008–10 revised accordingly) but the recurrence of adult birds in the same counties, and often at the same sites, over a period of several years probably means that some were returning birds. Only two juveniles were recorded in 2011–12. The most recent ten-year mean (2003–12) is currently 17 but numbers appear to be suffering a steady but inexorable decline.

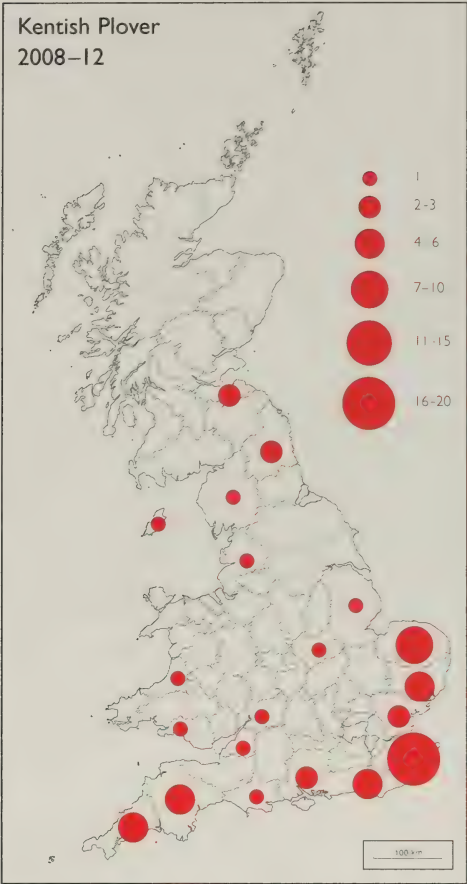
Kentish  
Plovers were  
present in just  
11 English  
counties

during 2011–12, and with eight records Kent was the best county. There were single records in both Scotland, at Tynninghame (Lothian) on 18th–19th April 2011, and Wales, at Ynyslas (Ceredigion) on 20th April 2012, and this species is now a real rarity throughout most of Britain (fig. 12).



Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

Ray Scally



**Fig. 12.** Distribution of Kentish Plovers *Charadrius alexandrinus* in Britain, 2008–12.

Three were seen together at Pegwell Bay (Kent) on 6th August 2011. Pegwell and Sandwich Bay has accounted for no fewer than 15 of the 68 Kentish Plovers (22%) recorded during 2008–12, which is the highest concentration of any scarce migrant species at a single site. All other records in 2011–12 were of single birds, and the total comprised eight birds identified as males and seven as females. Most were seen in spring – four in April and 14 in May – with the remaining seven in August.

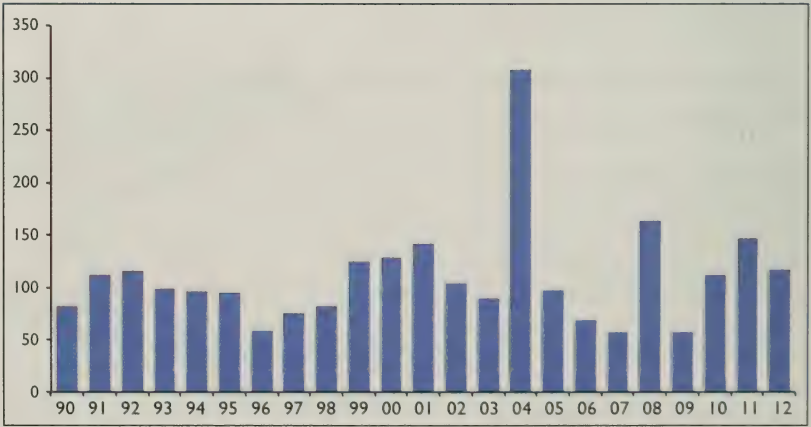
The northwest European breeding population has been in decline for over a century and now probably amounts to no more than 1,300 pairs from northern France to Denmark. In Germany and Denmark it now breeds only on the Wadden Sea coast, having largely disappeared from Baltic coastlines: numbers in Germany fell from 600 pairs in 1993 to 200 pairs in 1999 (Berndt *et al.* 2002), and in Denmark between 36 and 120 pairs bred from 1998 to 2010 (Nyegaard & Willemoes 2010; Thorup & Laursen 2010). Similar declines have occurred in the Netherlands, Belgium and northern France, where favoured breeding beaches have been lost to developers and the effects of tourism.

(Breeds Atlantic coastal regions of Iberian Peninsula N to Netherlands, Germany & Denmark, & Mediterranean basin & inland lakes to C Asia. Winters coastal regions of Mediterranean basin, Arabian Peninsula & S & SE Asia N to S Japan.)

Temminck’s Stint *Calidris temminckii*

Total 1968–2012	No. 2011 (rank/45)	No. 2012 (rank/45)	Other annual maxima 1968–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
4,449	148 (4)	118 (10)	2004/309/1	1987/176/2	Stable	Moderate

Annual means 1968–2009
1968–69 39
1970–79 77
1980–89 105
1990–99 95
2000–09 122
2010–12 126



**Fig. 13.** Annual totals of Temminck’s Stints *Calidris temminckii* in Britain, 1990–2012.



The numbers of Temminck's Stints recorded remain fairly consistent from year to year, other than the exceptional 309 seen in 2004 (fig. 13). During 2011–12 they appeared in 42 recording areas, more than half Britain's total, and as usual were concentrated in eastern England – the highest tallies were 54 in Norfolk, 31 in Lincolnshire, 19 in



Gary Thoburn

80. Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*, Steart, Somerset, December 2012.

Kent and 17 in Cambridgeshire. In Scotland, 11 were recorded in six areas, including four in Orkney, but the only Welsh record was one at Conwy (Caernarfonshire) on 3rd May 2011. Fig. 14 shows the distribution in the most recent five-year period, for 2008–12.

As in previous years, a relatively high proportion, 42 of 196 records, involved more than one bird, with the largest counts being eight at Frampton Marsh (Lincolnshire) on 7th May 2011, and five at both Cley and Hickling Broad (both Norfolk) in May of the same year.

There was an unusually early migrant at Fen Drayton (Cambridgeshire) on 17th April 2011 but the majority in both years appeared in May (when 207 were recorded), followed by 16 in June; most spring birds remained for just one day. Of the 37 seen in autumn, from mid July to mid November, only seven were aged: four juveniles and three adults.

Temminck's Stints are usually rare in winter but an exceptional five were seen in 2011–12: at Cotswold Water Park (Gloucestershire) on 3rd–13th December 2011, Swithland Reservoir (Leicestershire & Rutland) on 24th–28th December 2011, the Ouse Washes (Cambridgeshire) on 1st–30th January 2012, Rushy Common (Oxfordshire) on 19th–27th January 2012 and Steart (Somerset) from 3rd December 2012 into 2013 (plate 80). Four of these followed a large autumn passage in 2011, when 29 birds were recorded.

(Breeds mountains of S Scandinavia N to Barents Sea, N Gulf of Bothnia, & cool temperate Russia E to Chukotskiy peninsula, E Siberia. Winters S of breeding range from Mediterranean Basin, N Afrotropics, Middle East, S & SE Asia N to Japan.)

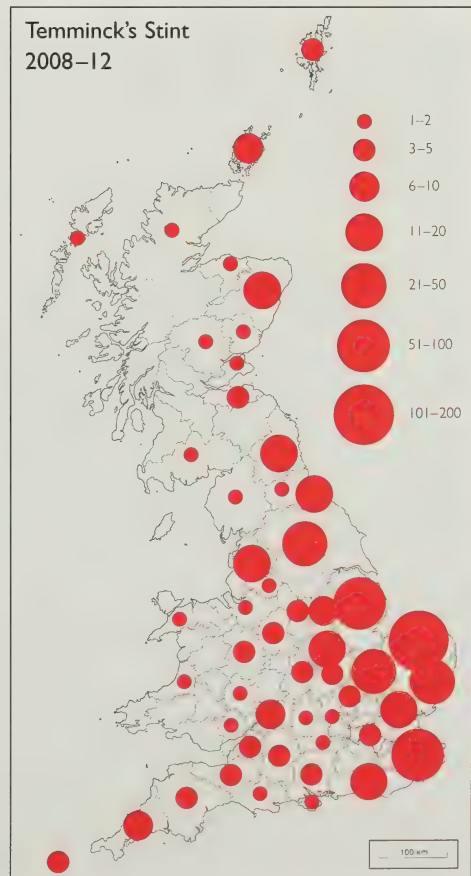
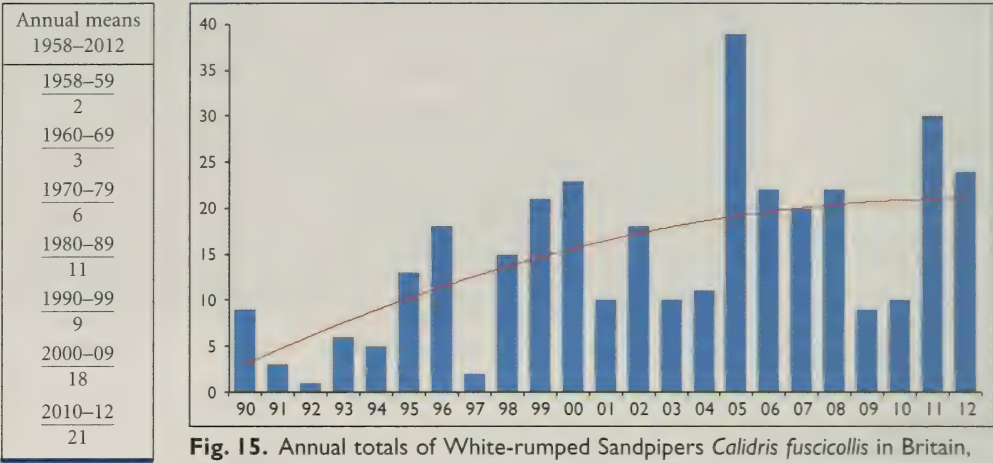


Fig. 14. Distribution of Temminck's Stints *Calidris temminckii* in Britain, 2008–12.

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
541	30 (2)	24 (3=)	2005/39/1	1984/24/3=	Increase	Moderate



Steve Young/Birdwatch



81. White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* (left), with Curlew Sandpiper *C. ferruginea*, Steart, Somerset, September 2012.

Two more excellent years, two of the best four on record, three of which have been in the last ten years (fig. 15). The geographical distribution of White-rumped Sandpipers has remained largely unchanged in recent years, and records in 2011–12 were received from 18 English counties, including seven in Norfolk and three in Northumberland. There were 18

records in Scotland, including ten in the Outer Hebrides and three on Tiree (Argyll), and three in Wales. Two were seen at Broadwater (Meirionnydd) on 5th November 2011, with all other records being of single birds.

Spring records are rare, and there were just three in the period, all during May, in Norfolk, Northumberland and Shetland. Return passage began in early July with eight recorded in that month, followed by ten in August, 14 in September, 12 in October and seven in November. Where ages were reported, 24 autumn birds were adults and 12 were juveniles. Adults predominated until the end of September with just two recorded thereafter; the earliest juvenile appeared on 21st September 2012.

(Breeds N Alaska & Arctic Canada, from Mackenzie River E to S Baffin Island. Overflies W Atlantic to winter S South America.)



Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Calidris subruficollis*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
1,097	97 (1)	53 (4)	2010/63/2	1977/54/3	Large increase	Moderate

Annual means 1958–2012
<u>1958–59</u> 1
<u>1960–69</u> 3
<u>1970–79</u> 21
<u>1980–89</u> 19
<u>1990–99</u> 15
<u>2000–09</u> 32
<u>2010–12</u> 71

Despite their global status as Near Threatened and a population that continues to decline (currently estimated at 35,000–78,000 individuals; Andres *et al.* 2012), the number of migrants recorded in Britain has increased significantly during this century. It seems likely that this is largely, if not entirely, due to increased observer coverage, especially in the north.

Three recording areas accounted for 41% of the total: Cornwall (25), the Outer Hebrides (24) and Scilly (13), while single-figure totals were recorded from another 26 counties. This has been the geographical pattern for several years now (see *Brit. Birds* 106: 394–395).

Buff-breasted Sandpipers remain rare in spring: four were recorded in both May and June over the two years in question. Intriguingly, the earliest records in both spring and autumn were at Frodsham (Cheshire & Wirral), on 15th May 2011 and 28th–30th July 2011 respectively, raising the questions of whether the same bird was involved and, if so, where had it spent the summer?

The autumn passage is one of the most concentrated of any species in this report with arrivals occurring overwhelmingly (typically around two-thirds of the total) during the month of September. Of those that were aged in 2011 and 2012, 62 were juveniles and ten were adults. The latest record was of a juvenile at Predannack Head (Cornwall) from 25th October to 4th November 2011.

(Breeds Chukotskiy Peninsula & Wrangel Island, E Siberia, & Arctic North America from N Alaska to Yukon, Northwest Territories & Queen Elizabeth Islands, Canada. Most migrate S through Midwest USA, with a few following Atlantic seaboard, to winter on grasslands of Uruguay, Paraguay & Argentina.)



82. Juvenile Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Calidris subruficollis* (right), with juvenile Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*, St Mary's, Scilly, October 2012.

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*

Total 1968–2012	No. 2011 (rank/45)	No. 2012 (rank/45)	Other annual maxima 1968–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
3,566	266 (1)	206 (2)	2003/192/3    2006/147/4	Increase	Moderate

Annual means 1968–2009
1968–69 16
1970–79 45
1980–89 70
1990–99 57
2000–09 122
2010–12 201

These were the two best-ever years, and the first to exceed 200 in a year. Pectoral Sandpipers were recorded in 52 areas during 2011–12, around two-thirds of the national total, with a distribution essentially similar to that of recent years (see *Brit. Birds* 106: 395–396). These figures include an enormous total of 60 in the Outer Hebrides in 2011, which perhaps

involved some slight duplication of records. Other large totals over the two years combined were 41 in Cornwall, 38 in Norfolk, 27 in Yorkshire and 24 in Orkney.

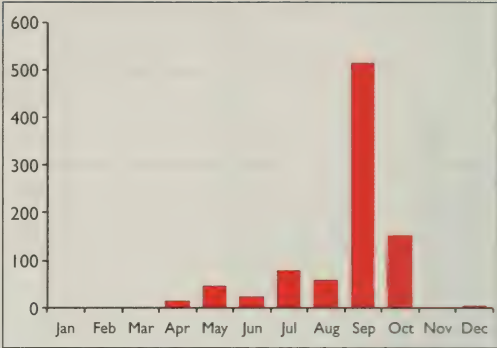


Fig. 16. Arrival dates of Pectoral Sandpipers *Calidris melanotos* in Britain by month, 2008–12.



Typically, birds were markedly less common in spring (April to June), with the two-year tally reaching 41. The first wave of autumn migrants, in July and August, was composed mainly of adults (31 adults, ten juveniles). In recent years, the pattern has been for more than half of all arrivals to appear in September (fig. 16) when these proportions are reversed; in 2011–12, 153 of the September birds were reported as juveniles and only eight as adults.

83. Juvenile Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*, Nanquidno, Cornwall, September 2011.

An exceptionally early juvenile at Cley (Norfolk) on 13th July 2012 was the only one in that month – perhaps it had not travelled far from its natal site. Almost all records were singles, but one notable exception was a group of four juveniles on the Ouse Washes (Cambridgeshire) on 17th September 2012.

(Breeds Arctic Siberia from Taimyr Peninsula E to Chukotskiy Peninsula, & North America from Alaska E to Southampton Island & S shore of Hudson Bay, Canada. Migrates through North America to winter South America from Peru & N Argentina to Patagonia.)

Kit Day



Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

Total 1986–2012	No. 2011 (rank/27)	No. 2012 (rank/27)	Other annual maxima 1986–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
877	46 (3)	26 (19)	1999/71/1    1989/47/2	Stable	Low

Annual means 1986–2012
<u>1986–89</u> 36
<u>1990–99</u> 34
<u>2000–09</u> 28
<u>2010–12</u> 38

The total in 2011 was the highest since 1999 whereas the 2012 tally was below the long-term average, yet records of migrant Red-necked Phalaropes have been remarkably consistent for 20 years or more. Birds were seen in 28 recording areas during 2011–12, when the distribution was similar to that of recent years. The highest totals were on the English east coast with ten in Yorkshire, nine in Norfolk and eight in Lincolnshire, although the top site was Slimbridge (Gloucestershire), where five were seen during 2011–12.

Thirty-six were seen in spring (between late April and June) 2011 but only nine in autumn, while in 2012 autumn records outnumbered those in spring by 15 to 11. A first-winter at Stephenson Point (Ayrshire) on 7th December 2011 was an unusual winter record.

(Circumpolar low-Arctic breeding range: N Scotland, Iceland, Scandinavia, Svalbard, N Russia, Alaska, N Canada and Greenland. Migrates overland to winter in cold current upwellings in tropical seas, particularly off W Pacific coast of South America, also Arabian Sea, Sundas & Moluccas, Indonesia, E to Papua New Guinea.)

Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*

Total 1986–2012	No. 2011 (rank/27)	No. 2012 (rank/27)	Other annual maxima 1986–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
8,887	689 (3)	153 (19)	2008/1,842/1    2001/1,125/2	Increase	Very high

Annual means 1986–2012
<u>1986–89</u> 283
<u>1990–99</u> 168
<u>2000–09</u> 487
<u>2010–12</u> 403

The total of Grey Phalaropes in 2011 was the third highest on record but did

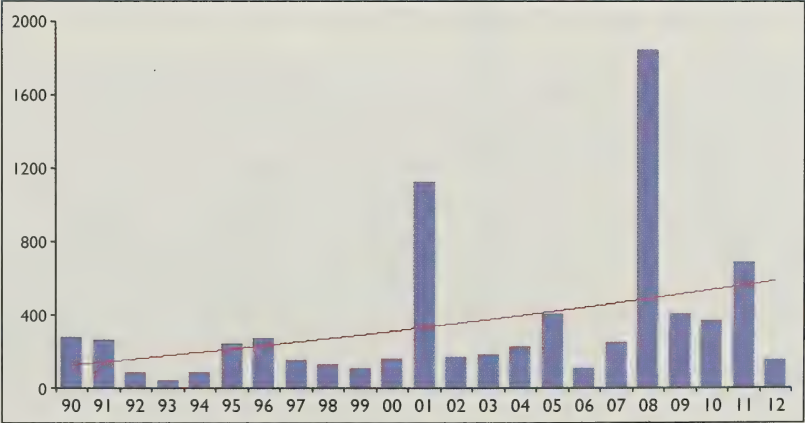


Fig. 17. Annual totals of Grey Phalaropes *Phalaropus fulicarius* in Britain, 1990–2012.

not come close to matching the massive arrivals in 2001 and 2008 (fig. 17). It differed from the 2008 influx not only in scale but also in distribution: in 2008 almost 60% were seen in Scotland (see McMillan *et al.* 2010), whereas in 2011 that proportion was less than 25%; in 2011, almost half (311) were in southwest England, two-thirds of those in Cornwall. The remainder were distributed in much smaller numbers throughout England and Wales. Virtually all were recorded in September and October with the main influx beginning during the third week of September. Peak counts included 31 off Pendeen Watch (Cornwall) on 13th September 2011 and 20 there on the 18th.

There were 43 winter records (December to February) during 2011–12, singles in March and

Ian Butler



84. First-winter Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*, Holt Prairie, Worcestershire, September 2011.

across Arctic Russia and islands, to N coastal Alaska and parts of N Canada and W Greenland. Mostly pelagic in winter at edge of Gulf Stream from North Carolina to Florida, USA, & cold current upwellings off W coast of Africa, & Pacific coast of South America.)

May, and two in June (in North-east Scotland in 2011 and Caithness in 2012). Although the three recent influxes exaggerate the latest decade averages, numbers outside influx years are perhaps increasing too (fig. 17).

(Circumpolar high-Arctic breeding range on coastal tundra, from Iceland and Svalbard E

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
886	13 (32)	12 (40)	1992/49/1	1970/37/2	Stable	Low

Annual means 1958–2012
1958–59
6
1960–69
11
1970–79
22
1980–89
14
1990–99
19
2000–09
17
2010–12
16

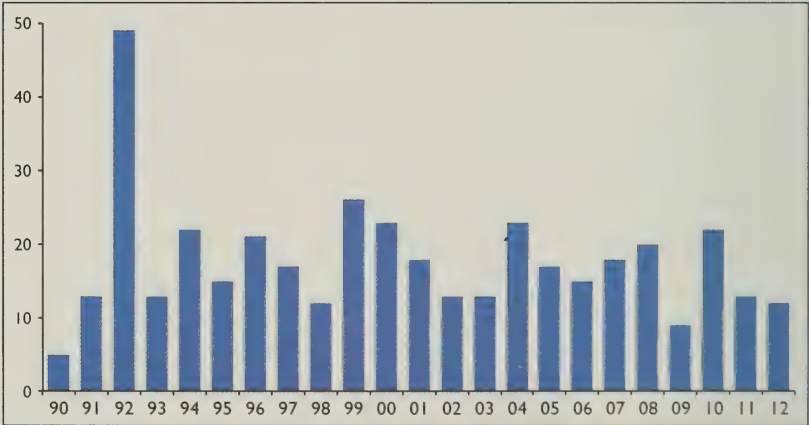


Fig. 18. Annual totals of White-winged Black Terns *Chlidonias leucopterus* in Britain, 1990–2012.

Although 2011 and 2012 produced two below-average totals, numbers have remained remarkably stable since 2000, ranging between nine and 23 (fig. 18).

Single White-winged Black Terns were recorded from 16 counties, and apart from one on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 9th July 2011, and another (possibly the same bird?) on Fair Isle on 16th July 2011, all of them were in England. There were ten spring (April to June) records, the earliest on 30th April 2011 at Minsmere (Suffolk), and 15 in July to September, the latest at Old Moor (Yorkshire) on 16th September 2011. In autumn seven were reported as adults and five as juveniles.

(Breeds Poland to Hungary, with sporadic breeding to W. Breeds commonly from Belarus, W Russia & Ukraine E to S Siberia, N Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Russian Far East & NE China, but absent from large areas. Winters throughout sub-Saharan Africa, Indian subcontinent, SE Asia & N Australia.)



Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini*

Total 1968–2012	No. 2011 (rank/45)	No. 2012 (rank/45)	Other annual maxima 1968–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
6,663	608 (2)	177 (11)	1987/710/1	1997/396/3	Stable	High

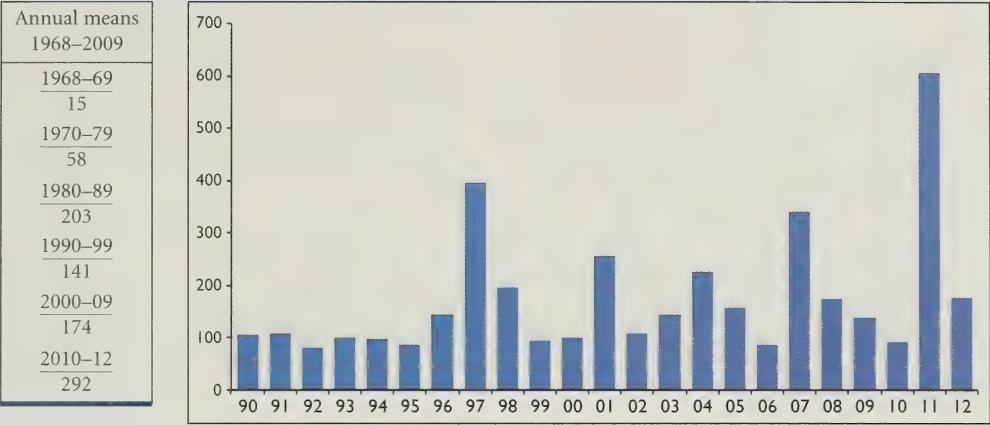


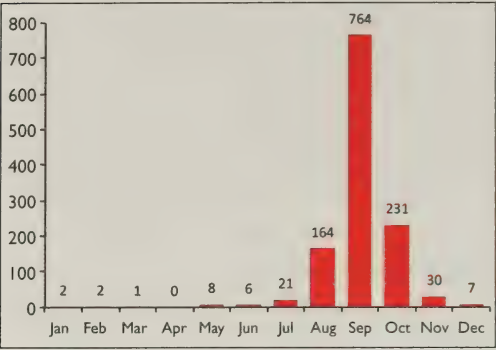
Fig. 19. Annual totals of Sabine's Gulls *Xema sabini* in Britain, 1990–2012.

In most years around 100–150 Sabine's Gulls are recorded in Britain, with such typical years leavened by occasional large influxes that inflate the ten-year means (fig. 19). In the period under review, 2011 was such an influx year, resulting in the largest arrival since the 'hurricane year' of 1987, while the 2012 total was close to the average of recent years. The timing of records, however, was similar in both years with the great majority in September, which is typical (fig. 20).

Weather conditions influence not only the number of records but also their distribution. In 2007 most of the 340 in that year were seen along the North Sea coasts, while during 2008–10



85. Juvenile Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini*, Exmouth, Devon, September 2011.



**Fig. 20.** Arrival dates of Sabine's Gulls *Xema sabini* in Britain by month, 2008–12.

juveniles and 206 as adults, while six seen during June to August were first-summerers. Notwithstanding the bias towards autumn records, unusually large numbers were reported during the winter months (December to February), with singles in Devon, Dumfries & Galloway, East Glamorgan, Kent, Norfolk, Orkney and Pembrokeshire, all in winter 2011/12. Until quite recently, winter records of Sabine's Gulls were generally discounted but the presence of very small numbers is now well documented.

(Circumpolar high-Arctic breeding range on coastal tundra from Svalbard, E across Arctic Russia and islands, to W & N coastal Alaska, parts of N Canada & N Greenland. Winters in South Atlantic off W Africa, off SE Africa in Indian Ocean, and in Pacific Ocean from N Mexico to Peru.)

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
1,874	24 (29)	15 (32)	1992/108/1	1990/94/2	Decline	Moderate

Annual means 1958–2012
1958–59 0
1960–69 0
1970–79 4
1980–89 47
1990–99 77
2000–09 54
2010–12 18

Although it remains difficult to keep an accurate track of the number of returning birds – it was estimated that no fewer than 48 returnees were seen during 2011–12 – it seems that numbers of new arrivals have been in decline recently, and the two years treated here brought two more mediocre totals. Some 13 first or second calendar-years were recorded over the two years.

Ring-billed Gulls were reported from 19 recording areas throughout Britain, with the expected bias towards west and southwestern coastal areas shown by the figures for the last five years (fig. 21).

What appeared to be a pair of adults was seen at Broadoak (Gloucestershire) from 30th March to 3rd April 2012; all other records were of single birds.

(Breeds temperate North America from British Columbia E to Maritime Provinces, Canada, S to NE California, Nevada & Wyoming to Michigan, also N Maine, USA. Winters to S of breeding range S to S Mexico & Gulf of Mexico, & inland on Great Lakes.)

records from southwest England predominated. The 2011 influx also showed a strong bias towards the west coast of Britain with 270 in the southwest (including 186 in Cornwall), 169 in Wales (including 97 in Pembrokeshire) and 90 in western Scotland and northwest England. In marked contrast, just 53 were seen in the North Sea and the Northern Isles. Few ventured inland: there were singles in Cambridgeshire in May and September 2011, Greater London in September 2011 and Buckinghamshire/Hertfordshire in July 2012.

Over the two years, 393 were reported as



**Fig. 21.** Distribution of Ring-billed Gulls *Larus delawarensis* in Britain, 2008–12.



### Alpine Swift *Apus melba*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
597	15 (10)	13 (12)	2010/48/1	2002/27/2	Stable	High

Annual means 1958–2012
1958–59 3
1960–69 6
1970–79 8
1980–89 12
1990–99 13
2000–09 13
2010–12 25

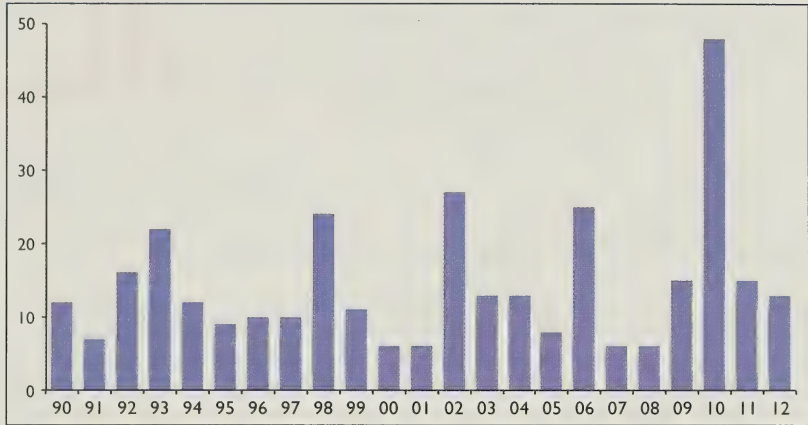


Fig. 22. Annual totals of Alpine Swifts *Apus melba* in Britain, 1990–2012.

Numbers were close to the medium-term average (fig. 22) but the timing of occurrence was decidedly atypical with proportionately more than usual seen in both autumns. Sixteen were seen in spring (March to June) and 12 in autumn (July to October), compared with a ratio of 60:8 during 2008–10.

The earliest was at the Lizard (Cornwall) on 18th March 2012 and the latest at Hanningfield Reservoir (Essex) on 25th October 2011. A fairly typical geographical spread included 14 on the English east coast and six in the southwest. Farther north, two were recorded on the Isle of Man and one in Lancashire & N Merseyside, while there were three singles in Scotland – in Lothian, Outer Hebrides and Shetland – but none in Wales. Two were seen in inland counties: at Taplow in Buckinghamshire on 3rd July 2011 and at Bassett Down in Wiltshire on 24th July 2011, the latter being the fifth for that county.

(Breeds discontinuously from NW Africa, throughout S Europe, N to C France & Switzerland, to Ukraine. To E, breeds locally through Turkey & Caucasus to Iran, Afghanistan & N Pakistan. Winter range unknown, but assumed to lie within Afrotropics or W India.)

### Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Total 1968–2012	No. 2011 (rank/45)	No. 2012 (rank/45)	Other annual maxima 1968–2012 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
5,256	166 (5)	103 (16)	1968/218/1	1980/188/2	Stable	Low

The two years in question proved to be a good one and an average one respectively and this species, having declined slightly during the 1990s and 2000s, now appears to be on a more or less even keel. Hoopoes were recorded in 56 areas, with almost half in southwest England, including 36 in Cornwall, 25 in Dorset and 22 in Devon. The largest totals elsewhere were 16 in Kent and ten in Yorkshire.

There were five records of wintering birds (December to February) in 2011–12, including a long-stayer at Little Shelford (Cambridgeshire) from 1st October 2011 into 2012, while intermittent sightings of one at Lowestoft, Suffolk, from 31st December 2011 to 28th March 2012 also suggest a prolonged stay by one elusive wintering bird. Spring arrivals dominated, with 206

Annual means 1968–2009
1968–69
147
1970–79
113
1980–89
133
1990–99
119
2000–09
93
2010–12
131

during March to June, and just 59 from July to November, a typical seasonal pattern (fig. 23).

(Breeds widely throughout warm & temperate regions of Europe N to N France & N Poland, sometimes N to Baltic States, E through S Russia, C Asia & N China. Some winter Mediterranean Basin & N Africa, but most winter in sub-Saharan Africa, S & SE Asia.)

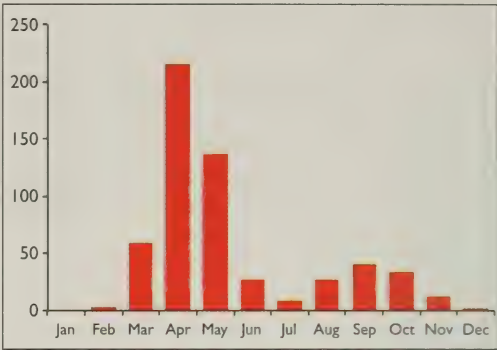


Fig. 23. Arrival dates of Hoopoes *Upupa epops* in Britain by month, 2008–12.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
1,351	89 (3)	70 (6)	1997/132/1    2002/104/2	Increase	Moderate

Annual means 1958–2012
1958–59
7
1960–69
4
1970–79
6
1980–89
20
1990–99
38
2000–09
44
2010–12
72

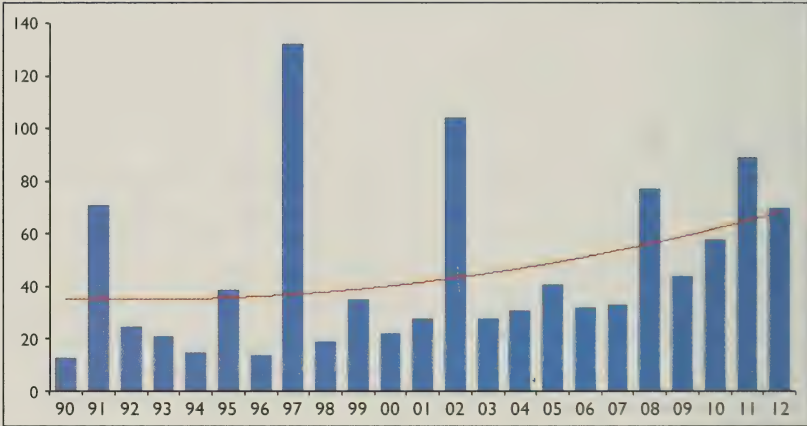


Fig. 24. Annual totals of European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster* in Britain, 1990–2012.



86. European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*, Seaburn, Co. Durham, November 2012.

Andy Jordan



Prior to 2003, annual fluctuations were very high, boosting decade averages, but since then there has been a more gradual, steady increase in numbers (fig. 24). Bee-eaters were seen in 28 areas, most along the southern and eastern English coasts (72 and 55 records respectively), while eight were seen in Wales and six in Scotland – a typically widespread distribution. Four counties notched up more than 30 birds: Scilly (50), Kent (38), Cornwall (35) and Yorkshire (32).

European Bee-eaters are overwhelmingly spring migrants with 146 appearing between April and June – the earliest at Fowey (Cornwall) and on St Mary’s (Scilly), both on 2nd April 2011 – and just 13 in autumn, the latest a juvenile at Seaburn (Co. Durham) from 31st October to 12th November 2012.

(Breeds NW Africa & Mediterranean Europe, N to C France & N Ukraine, occasionally N to S Sweden & the Netherlands, E through C Asia to E Kazakhstan. Winters throughout sub-Saharan Africa, & locally India and S Arabian Peninsula.)

Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*

Total 1986–2012	No. 2011 (rank/27)	No. 2012 (rank/27)	Other annual maxima 1986–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
8,001	459 (2)	320 (10)	2008/491/1    1998/416/3	Stable	Low

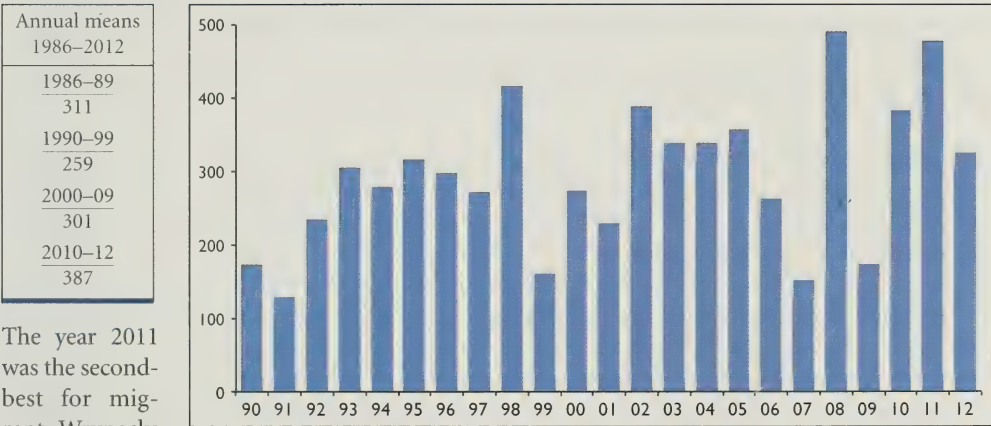


Fig. 25. Annual totals of Wrynecks *Jynx torquilla* in Britain, 1990–2012.

The year 2011 was the second-best for migrant Wrynecks since 1986,

following soon after the best year, 2008, yet there has been no clear trend in annual totals over the past 20 or so years, although numbers have become rather more variable in recent years (fig. 25).

Wrynecks were characteristically widespread during 2011–12, and reported from 53 recording areas. Typically, more than half the sightings were in southwest England, including 153 on Scilly, 70 in Cornwall, 64 in Dorset and 57 in Devon. The Scottish total of 123 included 58 in Shetland and 40 on Fair Isle, although five summer records in Highland were possibly breeding birds and have been excluded here. Norfolk accounted for almost half of the 137 recorded on the English east coast, while half of the 44 seen in Wales were in Pembrokeshire.

The earliest migrant was on Bryher (Scilly) on 25th March 2012 and a further 151 arrived in spring, almost all in April and May, with only five in June. The 625 autumn arrivals were spread fairly evenly between August, September and October, the outliers being two in July and four in the first week of November. Two at Canterbury (Kent) on 12th January 2012 was an unusual winter record.

Many records involved single birds but there were 50 reports of two or more, most notably a fall of at least 19 on Fair Isle on 24th August 2011 (the highest one-day total there since 1974) and, all in the same year, at least 21 in Shetland on 24th–26th August, four on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 25th August, four on St Agnes on 29th September and five on St Martin’s (both Scilly) on 1st October.

(Breeds throughout Europe from S Spain to N Finland, & Asia E to Sakhalin, Russia and Hokkaido, Japan. Some winter in Mediterranean basin, otherwise winters widely throughout Africa, and S & SE Asia.)

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*

Total 1958–2012	No. 2011 (rank/55)	No. 2012 (rank/55)	Other annual maxima 1958–2012 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2012	Annual variability 2000–2012
815	13 (19)	10 (29)	1992/125/1    2008/47/2	Stable	High

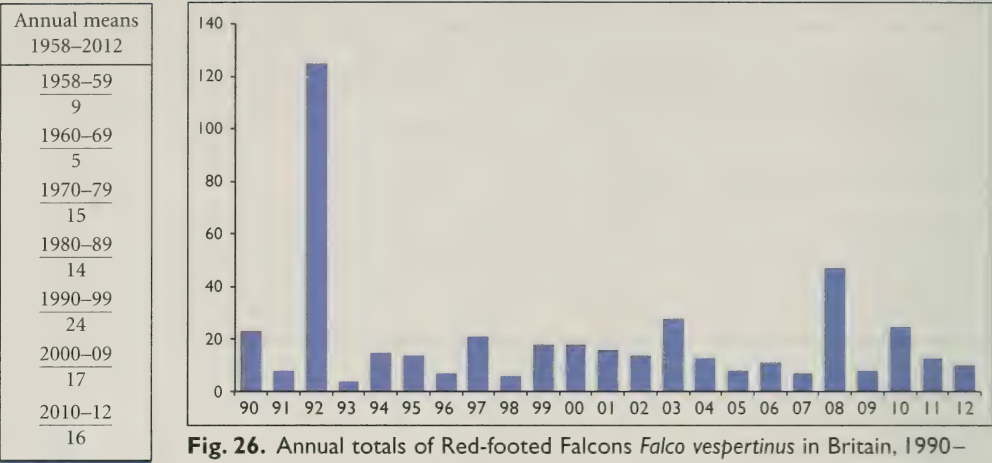


Fig. 26. Annual totals of Red-footed Falcons *Falco vespertinus* in Britain, 1990–2012.

Following the influx in 2008 (the revised figures show a grand total of 47, comfortably the second-best on record), and a smaller but still notable arrival in 2010, numbers were relatively low in 2011 and 2012. Annual totals have exceeded 20 birds in just six years since 1990 (fig. 26) and the ten-year means have shown little change since the 1970s.

The earliest, at Willingham-by-Stow (Lincolnshire) on 6th April 2011, was the only record in that month, while ten were recorded in both May and June and singles in August and September – the latest at Fenwick (Northumberland) on 21st September 2012. There were 13 on the English east coast, including four in Yorkshire and three in Norfolk, while inland two appeared in

Derbyshire (at Breaston on 17th–22nd June 2011 and at Willington GP on 4th–10th June 2012) and singles in Hereford (at Ledbury on 7th–11th June 2011) and Surrey (at Ranmore Common on 9th June 2011). None was seen in either Scotland or Wales.

Where reported, 12 were males and seven females, with four adults and 14 first-summers.

(Breeds in forested steppes of E Europe from E Hungary to temperate Russia, E to Baikal region. Migratory, wintering SW Africa.)



87. First-summer male Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*, Horsey, Norfolk, June 2011.

Oliver Slessor



## Acknowledgments

Thanks are due to all the county recorders and others who sent in records and, of course, the numerous birders who submitted their records for publication in county bird reports, without whom none of this would have been possible. The role of county recorders and local records committees is absolutely vital in ensuring that reports are scrutinised and that only confirmed records make it to publication.

The BirdGuides database proved invaluable in filling gaps in records received, and special thanks are due to the Scottish Birds Records Committee and the Welsh Records Panel, who adjudicate records in their respective countries of most of the species considered here; their publications can be accessed at [www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/records-committee](http://www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/records-committee) and [www.birdsinwales.org.uk/rare/wrp.htm](http://www.birdsinwales.org.uk/rare/wrp.htm)

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## Appendix 1. Additional records for 2008–10.

When dealing with some 5,000 records per year it is inevitable that some errors creep in and we are grateful to those recorders who have contacted us to correct them. Most commonly, these involve records that were not received in time to be included in the reports, and less frequently those that were published before they had been validated by records committees. All amendments have been incorporated into the national database and the statistics presented in this report updated. It is not possible to publish all the amendments, but those felt to be most significant are listed below. The following additional records of non-passerines were received after publication of the 2008–10 report.

Essex Night Heron – one in 2009; Kentish Plover – singles in 2009 and 2010; White-rumped Sandpiper – two in 2009; White-winged Black Tern – one in 2010.

Worcestershire American Wigeon – one in 2008; Great White Egret – one in 2009; Honey-buzzard – two in 2008; Spotted Crane – one in 2009; Pectoral Sandpiper – two in 2008, one in 2010; Temminck's Stint – two in 2008; Grey Phalarope – three in 2008, one in 2010; Red-necked Phalarope – two in 2009, one in 2010; Ring-billed Gull – two new birds in 2008 with one returning in 2009–10; Sabine's Gull – two in 2009; Hoopoe – one in 2010; Wryneck – two in 2008, one in both 2009 and 2010.

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# How the Redheads got the chop: the BBRC review of British records of Redhead

Martin Garner and Adam Rowlands

Richard Allen



The drake Redhead *Aythya americana* at Bleasby, Nottinghamshire, March 1996

**Abstract** A review of all the British records of Redhead *Aythya americana* was undertaken by BBRC following growing concerns about several records since 2000. The background to, and the process of, that review is described here. Following the completion of the review, only one record remains acceptable: that of a male at Bleasby, Nottinghamshire, in March 1996, then at Rutland Water, Leicestershire & Rutland, in February 1997.

## Introduction

The first British record of the Redhead *Aythya americana* was a drake at Bleasby, Nottinghamshire, on 8th–27th March 1996

(Dennis 1996; BOU 1998; *Brit. Birds* 90: 464; 91: 149–154). The following winter, a drake appeared at Rutland Water, Leicestershire & Rutland, again in late winter, on 4th–24th



February 1997. Since Bleasby lies only about 50 km NNW of Rutland Water and the timing of the two records was similar, it was widely assumed that the same individual was involved. However, BBRC considered that the evidence for just one individual was circumstantial and treated the two birds as different individuals, with a caveat that this view could be revised if there were further, similar, records (*Brit. Birds* 91: 467).

Yet there were no further British records of Redhead until 2001, when a drake was located at Kenfig Pool, East Glamorgan, on 7th November (Bolt 2001). This bird spent the winter at Kenfig, where it was seen by many observers, including a number of previous and current BBRC members, before the last sighting on 5th February 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 95: 487). By this stage, BBRC had revised its view on the number of individuals involved in 1996–97, considering that the balance of probability was that the Bleasby and Rutland Water birds involved the same drake, which in turn meant that the Kenfig bird became the second for Britain. The species comment in the 2001 BBRC report noted how ‘the bird’s appearance changed quite dramatically depending on light conditions. In bright sunlight there seemed little difference in mantle colour between it and the accompanying Common Pochards *A. ferina* (hereafter simply “Pochard”), and identification largely relied on the blue-grey bill. In duller light, however, the darker back was much more obvious.’

The Welsh bird returned to Kenfig on 21st September 2002, where it remained until 31st January 2003 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 557, 97: 563), when it moved to Cosmeston Lakes on 6th–16th February and Lisvane Reservoir on 16th–23rd February 2003. It was relocated at Kenfig Pool in autumn 2003, where it remained from 29th October to 14th November (*Brit. Birds* 97: 563), then at Llanilid on 9th and 13th March 2004. It returned once more to Kenfig on 13th October 2004, where it was last recorded on 26th December that year (*Brit. Birds* 98: 634).

Meanwhile, in autumn 2003 a first-winter Redhead was discovered at Loch Tangasdale, Barra, Outer Hebrides, on 20th September, where it remained until 15th April 2004 (Scott 2004; Scott *et al.* 2004; *Brit. Birds* 97:

563), and what was presumed to be the same bird was seen elsewhere on Barra, at Loch an Duin, on 7th–8th November 2004 (*Brit. Birds* 100: 20).

In autumn 2005 a drake Redhead was claimed at Kenfig Pool on 24th September. This was assumed by the observer to be the returning drake, but after reviewing the submission BBRC found this record not proven (*Brit. Birds* 100: 102). During the assessment of this individual, doubts were also raised about the identification of the drake that had returned to East Glamorgan in 2002–04. Later that same year, what was assumed by BBRC to be the returning Barra bird was reported from Loch Bhasapoll, Tiree, Argyll, from 14th December to 22nd March 2006. Also during this period, a drake was reported on the Outer Hebrides, at Loch Earsay on Lewis, on 14th January 2006. And then, in the following year, yet another claim was received from Kenfig Pool, this time of a juvenile female on 1st–3rd August 2007.

During the consideration of these various records, concern among BBRC members began to grow and there was an increasing sense that a reappraisal of our approach to the assessment of this species was needed. There was some debate as to whether that reappraisal should just involve the returning East Glamorgan drake or whether it should be extended to include all individuals after the drake in the Midlands, but ultimately it was decided that the most appropriate action was a full review of all records.

The original doubts that precipitated the review related to apparently anomalous features shown by the returning drake in East Glamorgan. These included iris colour, head shape and size, and body plumage coloration, which appeared to be more consistent with a bird of hybrid origin. Although a great many observers saw the bird, the identification was not widely questioned at the time, nor when the record was published by BBRC. Nonetheless, several BBRC members who saw both the Bleasby bird and the East Glamorgan bird made comments on file about how distinctive the Bleasby drake was compared with the Welsh bird, which could sometimes appear distinctly more Pochard-like.

**Table 1.** Proposed key features of Redhead *Aythya americana*, showing the importance of these features in the assessment process of vagrants.

Feature	Male	Female	Requirement for acceptance?
Size	Larger than Pochard in direct comparison.	As for males.	Essential for birds associating with Pochards.
Shape	Sits higher in the water than Pochard. Often with tail cocked.	As for males.	Supportive
Head shape	Diagnostic is a steep forehead with 'bushy' or bulging forecrown and rounded rear crown and nape. Peak of crown usually directly above or in front of eye. Head shape may vary with attitude and may show typically steep forehead and flat crown, or (occasionally) more sloping forehead with peak of crown just behind eye, but retaining rounded rear crown and nape.	Similar to male, though slightly less 'exaggerated'.	Steep forehead essential.
Iris colour	Yellow (may be golden-yellow or even orangey-yellow, but lacks the reddish tones of male Pochard).	Not considered relevant for identification.	Essential
Bill	Pale grey bill with broad black tip and diffuse paler (greyish-white) subterminal band. Dark nostrils conspicuous and nostril groove frequently looks quite long.	Similar to male, but base is typically darker. The bill is blackish in juveniles and summer females.	Essential, but nostril features supportive.
Loral bulge (the extent to which the loral feathering bulges against the bill base)	Weak or almost vertical in Redhead, more obvious and rounded in Pochard.	As for males.	Supportive
Head pattern	Not relevant for identification.	Often rather uniform, but with darker crown and nape and often noticeably paler around the bill base. Usually a prominent pale eye-ring and narrow pale line extending behind the eye. The dark crown usually extends down to the eye-ring and post-ocular line, creating a 'capped' effect. Any dark loral markings are usually diffuse and inconspicuous.	The 'capped effect' and lack of a prominent dark stripe across <i>effectively</i> plain lores is considered <b>essential</b> for the identification of females.
Body coloration	Upperparts and flanks are darker grey than Pochard, with conspicuously darker tertials.	More uniform body coloration than Pochard, with reduced contrast between breast and flanks. Often more warmly coloured than Pochard in winter, with some birds uniformly rich, warm (almost rusty-washed) brown. Such individuals are very distinctive. Others have contrast between browner head and breast and greyer body and flanks, though less striking than most Pochards. This varies seasonally and applies only to 'winter' plumage. Juvenile Pochard and females in summer (June/July) can be very uniformly warm, even 'rusty' brown.	Essential (winter females should lack the strong contrast between grey upperparts/flanks and darker brown breast, which is typical of Pochard).
Tail and undertail-coverts		Has a habit of carrying tail cocked above surface of water, revealing conspicuous white undertail-coverts on many.	Supportive



## The BBRC review

An essential part of the review process was to establish a set of consistent identification criteria that could be applied to the assessment of all past and future claims of Redhead. Table 1 sets out the key identification features for both sexes and the importance of these in the assessment process. It was compiled with reference to Lonergan *et al.* (2007) and Garner (2008), together with observations of the species both in the wild and in captivity and a review of published photographs. Note that this table is not intended to form a comprehensive reference for identification, but as a guide to the assessment of claims of this species in a British context.

The head shape is a key feature but, as in many *Aythya* species, it varies according to posture, attitude and behaviour. It was therefore important to determine whether BBRC members considered the typical head shape to be a prerequisite for acceptance or a supportive feature. It was also important to consider how this would be applied in relation to the circumstances of the observation. For instance, an exhausted vagrant seen rather briefly may never show the characteristic head shape, whereas it would be reasonable

to expect this feature to be well documented on a long-staying bird. We needed to determine whether this feature was essential for acceptance, which could lead to some good records being lost because of the brevity of the observation, or whether we should be pragmatic – which might lead to some potential hybrids being given the benefit of the doubt.

This example highlights the difficulties faced by BBRC when evaluating claims of species (or subspecies) in which the spectre of hybridisation (intergradation) has to be considered. Essentially, the Committee has to establish thresholds in relation to salient features to determine which individuals can be considered acceptable and to ensure that a consistent approach is maintained. Such conundrums are not unusual, and a similar process has been applied previously to the assessment of ‘Black-headed Wagtails’ *Motacilla flava feldegg* and Pine Buntings *Emberiza leucocephalos*, where the salient features to enable consistent decisions have to be determined. These decisions are usually contentious, with individual members of the Committee often having different views on where a line should be drawn. Ultimately, however, this highlights one of the strengths of



Hugh Harrop

**88.** An alert drake Redhead *Aythya americana*, showing the typical head shape of the species, with steep forehead and rounded rear crown and nape. The peak of the crown is fractionally behind the eye in this image but the bill pattern is typical, showing an almost straight ‘loral bulge’. Plates 88–91 all show birds photographed at Okanagan, Canada, in December 2006.

Hugh Harrop



89. A male Redhead *Aythya americana*, showing the typical head shape: steep forehead, bulging forecrown and peak of the crown above the eye. Note typical bill pattern and straight 'loral bulge', and also typically dark grey body coloration.

Hugh Harrop



90. Female Redhead *Aythya americana*, showing slight hint of a dark line across pale lores, yet this is diffuse and inconspicuous compared with female Common Pochard *A. ferina*. Overall the body plumage is warm brown, lacking the greyish tones of female Pochard. The breast is a similar colour to, and doesn't contrast with, the flanks.

Hugh Harrop



91. Female Redhead *Aythya americana*, with typical steep forehead, flattish crown and rounded nape, and lacking a 'loral bulge'. The dark-capped effect contrasting with pale eye-ring and loral area is also typical. This individual shows somewhat greyer body coloration and a slightly darker breast. As is the case with many female *Aythya* ducks, plumage variation can be significant!



a committee approach: that of reaching a collaborative decision rather than deferring to an individual position.

This explanation of the process may help to explain why BBRC reviews tend to take so long. From the initial debate surrounding the identification of particular individuals, through a period of research and then development of a framework by which to assess claims is a time-consuming process. This inevitably leads to a complex file containing a number of submissions, previous assessments and reference material. Additional discussion and contributions can arise once the review process has been announced (for example Vinicombe (2008) in this case), which need to be included and considered as part of the assessment. The opportunity to reflect on the views and contributions of voting members during the course of the assessment is also important, and this may involve revisiting the files or reference material or seeking out new sources of information. Committee members have to prioritise their workload and review files are often given a lower importance than the more routine submissions that form the bulk of each year's annual report. Compared with the enormous workload of tackling a review file, the routine assessments of straightforward species are comparatively easy, while it is also important to maintain momentum on those routine submissions to ensure that the annual report is as complete as possible.

The Redhead review was no exception to this general pattern. By spring 2011 it was clear that the review was almost finished and that we needed to 'put the Redheads to bed'. The results were published later

that year (*Brit. Birds* 104: 563–564; 628–629); note that the decision (published in the 2001 report) that the Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire records involved the same individual was overlooked and they were mistakenly published in the 2010 report as separate birds.

## The outcome of the review, and reasons for treating some records as 'not proven'

**The male in the Midlands, at Bleasby in 1996 and Rutland Water in 1997**

This adult male was reviewed and remains acceptable; the bird showed a classic suite of features typical of a genuine male Redhead (see plates 92 & 93).



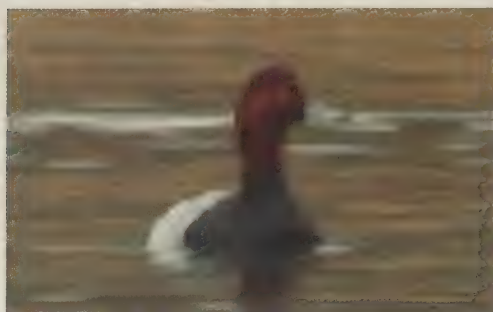
Iain Leach



Iain Leach

**92 & 93.** Male Redhead *Aythya americana*, Bleasby, Nottinghamshire, March 1996. This male consistently showed all the features of Redhead. In particular, the distinctive head shape was a consistent feature and can be seen here in direct comparison with a female Common Pochard *A. ferina*. The Redhead was distinctly larger than the accompanying male Pochards and the darker body coloration was also a consistent distinguishing feature.

Pete Wragg



Alan Clewes



Alan Clewes



Hannu Huhtinen



**94–97.** The East Glamorgan drake: at Kenfig Pool in November 2002 (94); at Cosmeston Park Lake in February 2003 (95, 96); and at Kenfig in October 2004 (97). Plates 95–97 show a markedly reddish-orange iris colour and a rather Pochard-like head shape, both of which rang alarm bells. In some lights, the distinctly pale grey mantle and flanks was another concern. However, plate 94 shows how the bird looks much more convincing when alert. This image, from [www.surfbirds.com](http://www.surfbirds.com), was the only one we could find where the bird's head shape approached that of a typical Redhead. These images show the inherent risks of limited photographic evidence and/or a bird that is seen only briefly, and illustrate the very real problem of assessing head shape accurately under such circumstances.

#### The male at Kenfig Pool and other sites in East Glamorgan between November 2001 and December 2004

When all the images of this bird were considered, there were consistent features that suggested its acceptance was unsafe. The head shape frequently showed a closer resemblance to Pochard than Redhead, lacking the steep forehead, bulging forecrown and rounded rear crown and nape. The orange colour of the iris was considered too strong for Redhead, and another indicator of Pochard genes. The comments reported above relating to the rather pale grey colour of the upperparts were also felt to be an indicator that this bird was not a genuine Redhead. This record was unanimously considered not proven on review.

#### The female on Barra between September 2003 and November 2004, and on Tiree between December 2005 and March 2006

This record received a split vote on review, with six members voting 'not proven' and

four for continued acceptance. Since a majority decision is required to overturn a previously accepted record, this individual was removed from the BBRC database by the narrowest of margins. This reinforces the fact that the Committee was not wholly convinced that a mistake had been made, but that the evidence available was insufficient for the record to continue to stand as accepted.

Those unconvinced by the record considered the following features to be at odds with the identification. The extensive pale in the face was thought to be at the extreme end for Redhead and closer to Pochard, while it was apparent that the bird showed a dark line across the lores, which is far less conspicuous on the rare occasions it is evident on a genuine Redhead. The head shape of the bird in all the images available to us appeared to show a sloping forehead, with the peak of the crown behind the eye, and we found no evidence showing that the peak of the crown was in front of the eye. The apparent contrast between the brown breast and grey body

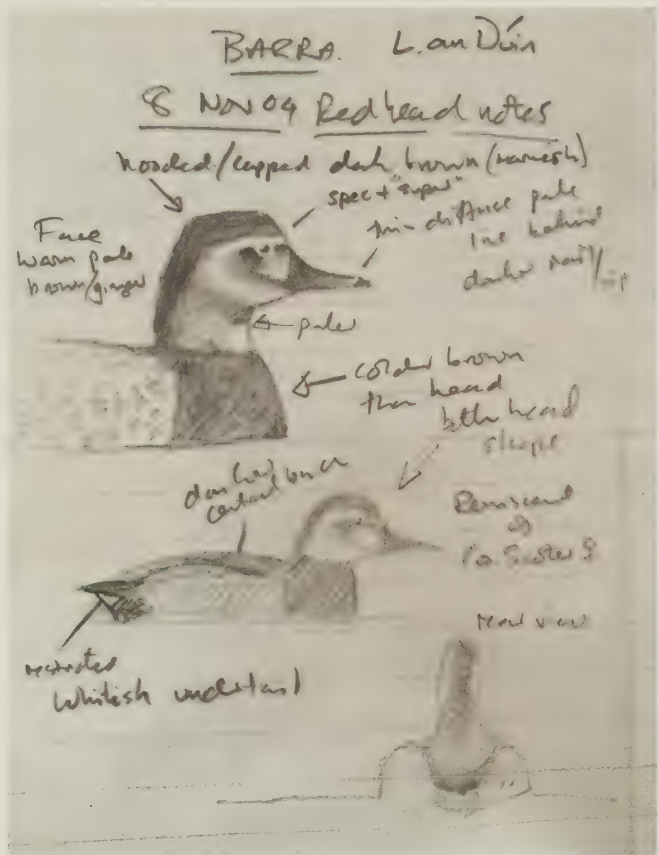


appeared to be too strong for Redhead, while the lack of prominent pale undertail-coverts was also felt to be atypical for a genuine Redhead. The rather thin-billed appearance in profile and the apparent bill coloration in the images also raised concerns, although some voters felt that these features were equivocal in terms of the identification and/or that they could not be reliably determined from the material available.

There was some concern about the assumption that all the records involved the same individual. Some members felt that had the Tiree bird in fact been a different individual from the Barra bird, the case for continued acceptance of the latter may have been stronger. Nonetheless, there was a pervading sense that the evidence available was insufficient to support the identification, which ultimately led to the decision to remove these records.

#### The male at Loch Earsay, Lewis, 14th January 2006

This record of an adult male had been pending prior to the review. It was thought to be a strong candidate for Redhead and during the review process it received four



Alan Lauder

**Fig. 1.** The Barra female; illustration from 8th November 2004 showing apparently obvious dark line across lores and contrasting darker breast.



Calum Scott



Calum Scott



Calum Scott

**98–100.** Images of the Barra female, October 2003. Many of the images, which are stills from a digiscoped video sequence, appeared to support the identification as a Redhead, but other features that were consistent in the written descriptions, such as a darker breast and dark line between the bill and the eye, appear not to be visible in the photos, lending some concern to their reliability.

Andy Robinson



Andy Robinson

**101 & 102.** Images of the putative drake Redhead on Lewis, January 2006.

votes in favour of the identification being accepted. The biggest concern was the fact that it was seen on only a single date, and that relatively few photos were taken. Although these revealed a head shape that *could* be shown by Redhead, none of them showed the more distinctive 'classic' head shape with a bulging forecrown. It was also considered that the true shade of grey of the mantle and flanks could not be assessed accurately. It was pointed out that a similar description and set of images could have been submitted for the returning drake in East Glamorgan had it stayed for only one day. This convinced the majority of voters that the safest action was to consider the record 'not proven', despite the fact that the claim *may* have involved a genuine Redhead.

### The juvenile in East Glamorgan, 1st–3rd August 2007

This record was also assessed as part of the review. The remarkably early date for a juvenile transatlantic vagrant immediately raises concerns, with no precedent among other vagrant Nearctic wildfowl. Ultimately, BBRC could not resolve the identification of this individual, and the occurrence of other 'Redhead-lookalikes' in areas of England and Wales close to the Severn Estuary reinforced

the need for a cautious approach. It was considered that Pochard influence could not be ruled out from the bird's appearance in terms of both structure and plumage.

### Conclusions and recommendations for future claims

We recognise that some observers, including some current and former members of BBRC, will be disappointed with the decision to remove the records described above and will remain adamant that some of these are safely identifiable as Redheads. Indeed, the conclusion is not that the birds have definitely been identified incorrectly, but that the available evidence was insufficient for the records to remain accepted. Ultimately, we concluded that this was the only way to apply a consistent approach to assessing records of this species in Britain.

Following this review, observers of any future potential Redhead should make every effort to obtain detailed descriptions and high-quality images (stills and/or video) to support the claim. It is important to obtain as many images of the bird in different postures as possible. The diagnostic head shape of Redhead appears to be most frequently adopted when the birds are alert. They regularly adopt a more sloping forehead when

N. P. Roberts



N. P. Roberts

**103 & 104.** Images of the putative juvenile Redhead in East Glamorgan, August 2007.



diving, and the effort of a prolonged observation period – when the bird will hopefully engage in a variety of behaviours – is well worthwhile. Observers are encouraged to use the table and references in this paper to guide them in ensuring that all salient features to support the identification are documented.

This conclusion can be applied more generally to all rare and scarce wildfowl. There are particular parallels with Canvasback *A. valisineria*, which like Redhead is extremely rare in western Europe, and rare in northeast North America (unlike the more frequently occurring Ring-necked Duck *A. collaris* and Lesser Scaup *A. affinis*). BBRC has come in for some criticism in relation to recent decisions over Canvasback claims, where once again anomalous features were considered to indicate a potential hybrid origin. As for Redheads, the decisions in these instances were not unanimous, highlighting the difficulty of achieving a consensus of opinion when dealing with such vexed questions.

## Acknowledgments

We are extremely grateful to the observers who

submitted their descriptions and images for consideration by the Committee. Without their support this review would not have been possible. We would also like to thank everyone who supplied photographs, in particular Hugh Harrop (who provided a considerable number of images that proved valuable reference material), and Hannu Huhtinen, Alan Lauder, Iain Leach, Andy Robinson and Harry Scott for helping with last-minute requests relating to the illustrations.

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British Birds Rarities Committee



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# White-winged Scoter in North-east Scotland: new to Britain

Chris Gibbins, Paul Baxter and Hywel Maggs

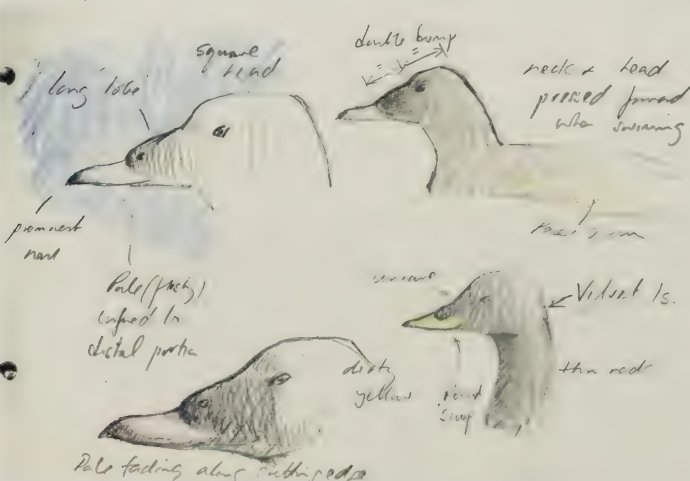
**Abstract** A White-winged Scoter *Melanitta deglandi* of the nominate race, which breeds in North America, was found amongst the large summering scoter flock at Blackdog, North-east Scotland, on 11th June 2011. It was the first for Britain, and also the first second-calendar-year bird to be identified in Europe. The discovery and identification of the bird are described, and records of vagrant White-winged Scoters in Europe are summarised.

On Saturday 11th June 2011 we had planned an early morning trip to the Ythan Estuary, mainly to look for waders and terns. We arrived to find that the state of the tide was not ideal, so decided to travel the short distance down the coast to the Blackdog area to check the scoter flock. Our revised plan was to check the scoter for an hour or two, and then return to the Ythan once the tide had dropped sufficiently. However, the events which unfolded at Blackdog meant that we did not make it back to the Ythan that day, or indeed the following day.

The stretch of coast between Blackdog and Murcar, just to the north of Aberdeen, is well

known for the scoter flock that gathers to moult during the summer months. Numbers start to increase in early May and the birds generally remain until August. Common Scoters *M. nigra* predominate, with annual peak counts of around 3,000 birds. Velvet Scoters *M. fusca* are often present in good numbers; previous counts have reached the low hundreds, although numbers have declined in recent years and nowadays just a few tens are present. Each year several Surf Scoters *M. perspicillata* are found, with between three and eight birds recorded annually since 2004. The scoter flock is joined by Common Eiders *Somateria mollissima*, which also moult here, in some years swelling the

gathering to more than 6,000 ducks. Observing the birds can be difficult, depending on the wind strength, light conditions and their exact location and behaviour (roosting or diving). Nonetheless, it is a worthwhile challenge, and that morning we were motivated by ideal viewing conditions. The presence of a Black Scoter *M. americana* a few days earlier off the Northumberland



**Fig. 1.** Field sketches of North-east Scotland 'American White-winged Scoter' *Melanitta d. deglandi* and a first-summer Velvet Scoter *M. fusca*.

Chris Gibbins



coast provided a further incentive; perhaps it was now at Blackdog...

It was mid morning when we started checking the scoter flock, and the sun was above our heads. The flat sea and neutral light meant that, despite the distances involved, we could see the necessary detail on most of the birds. Shortly after our arrival the birds took flight and moved a kilometre or so farther north. We followed them and settled down to start a new scan. Fairly quickly, CG came across an odd-looking bird; it was the last in a long line of scoters, and the first bird he saw as he started his scan. He alerted the others to it and, because of its position and striking appearance, PAAB and HEM were onto it straightaway. Wow! Its overall appearance instantly concentrated our minds. The bird's double-bumped head profile and thick neck, and its habit of holding its head forward while swimming, gave it a particularly distinctive jizz. On the bill of Velvet Scoter, the pale area extends under and behind the nostril as a rounded lobe, yet that on our bird was confined to the middle portion and extended along the cutting edge only as far as the nostril. Moreover, rather than being the yellow colour of Velvet Scoter, the pale area was a dirty flesh colour. As these features registered in our minds, the solution to the puzzle began to present itself: the bird was surely a White-winged Scoter *M. deglandi*.

## Identification

Given the recent discovery of a bird of the east Asian race in Ireland (Farrar & Jones 2011), our next task was to determine whether our bird was of the nominate race or the east Asian *stejnegeri*. We had seen pictures of the Irish adult male *stejnegeri* and boy was it distinctive! The problem with our bird was that, although it was a male, it was clearly an immature and virtually all of the identification literature on these vagrant scoters concentrated on adults. Thus, over the course of the next hour or so we watched the bird, made notes (fig. 1) and discussed the extent to which the features used to separate adult males might be useful for the identification of immatures. We provisionally aged it as a first-summer, based on the fact that, unlike second-summer birds, it had an extensively

white belly and the bill colour and eye crescent were much more subdued than on adults and older immatures.

The distinctive bill horns and vibrant bill colours shown by adult male White-winged Scoters of both races were missing, so we reasoned that head shape might provide the best clues for identification. We therefore focused on a critical examination of head shape, while also noting other potentially relevant clues including flank coloration relative to the rest of the body, the pattern of the white around the eye, and the precise extent of pale on the bill. Based on our recollections of the



Nick Littlewood

**105.** A montage of digiscoped images of the 2CY male 'American White-winged Scoter' *Melanitta d. deglandi* at Blackdog, North-east Scotland, June 2011. These images, by Nick Littlewood, helped to confirm the identification. Although lacking the gaudy bill ornamentation and colour of an adult male, this second-calendar-year male is readily identifiable using structural traits. Note the double-bumped profile formed by the bulging forehead and step on the bill. Its head is rather square and it has a solid neck. The pale area on the distal portion of the bill is restricted, crucially extends only to the nostril, and is fleshy-toned. On first-summer Velvet Scoter *M. fusca*, the pale area on the bill is distinctly yellow-toned and extends to the rear of the nostril as a round lobe.

literature, we came to the conclusion that it best fitted the North American race *M. d. deglandi*.

Shortly after midday we decided to leave Blackdog and do some research on the appearance of first-summer males. The next three or four hours were spent comparing our notes, sketches and photographs of the bird with material on the internet and published literature (including Proctor & Pullan 1997, Garner 1999 and Garner *et al.* 2004). The images available supported our initial conclusion that it best fitted *M. d. deglandi*. However, the bird was frustratingly distant so the exact pattern of the pale areas on the bill was difficult to establish. The photos we were able to obtain using CG's DSLR camera and 400-mm lens were poor to say the least. Nonetheless, it was a striking bird and the more we looked at it the more convinced we became that it was *M. d. deglandi*. At this point we decided to call Martin Garner, who had published two articles on vagrant scoter identification, to seek his opinion. We e-mailed him CG's photographs, explained

what we had been able to see on the bird and tried to convey how distinctive it was. But the reality was that the photos were poor and Martin was appropriately cautious. This was something of an acid test for us – while we were sure, it was clear that the images were less than convincing. Because of the magnitude of the find, we wanted to get the identification right, so we decided that the best strategy was to double-check everything again the following morning and to secure better photographs. We contacted Nick Littlewood, a Blackdog regular and proud owner of a digiscoping set-up, and asked him to accompany us early the following day.

Weather conditions on the Sunday morning were good, the birds were behaving themselves, and by lunchtime Nick had secured images (plate 105) that showed what we had been able to see in the field. Now confident that we had sufficient material to convince others, it was time to go public and we started the process of alerting birders and the news services. This was the point that we could finally begin to relax and enjoy the moment; as the first birders began to arrive, the sun came out and everyone enjoyed a wonderful sunny afternoon – metaphorically and literally.

The bird stayed around until 23rd June and several hundred people caught up with it over this period. However, because of mixed weather and the distance of the scoter flock offshore, many birders struggled to see it well and some failed to see it at all.

### Taxonomy and status

Prior to 2005, the three taxa comprising the 'white-winged scoter complex', from Europe, Asia and North America, were treated as races of a single, wide-ranging species, the Velvet Scoter. But following Sangster *et al.* (2005), BOURC recognised that the taxa from North America and east Asia were sufficiently differentiated from Velvet Scoter to merit treatment as a distinct species; these became White-winged Scoter,

Matthew Deans



Matthew Deans



**106 & 107.** 'American White-winged Scoter' *Melanitta d. deglandi*, Blackdog, North-east Scotland, June 2011.

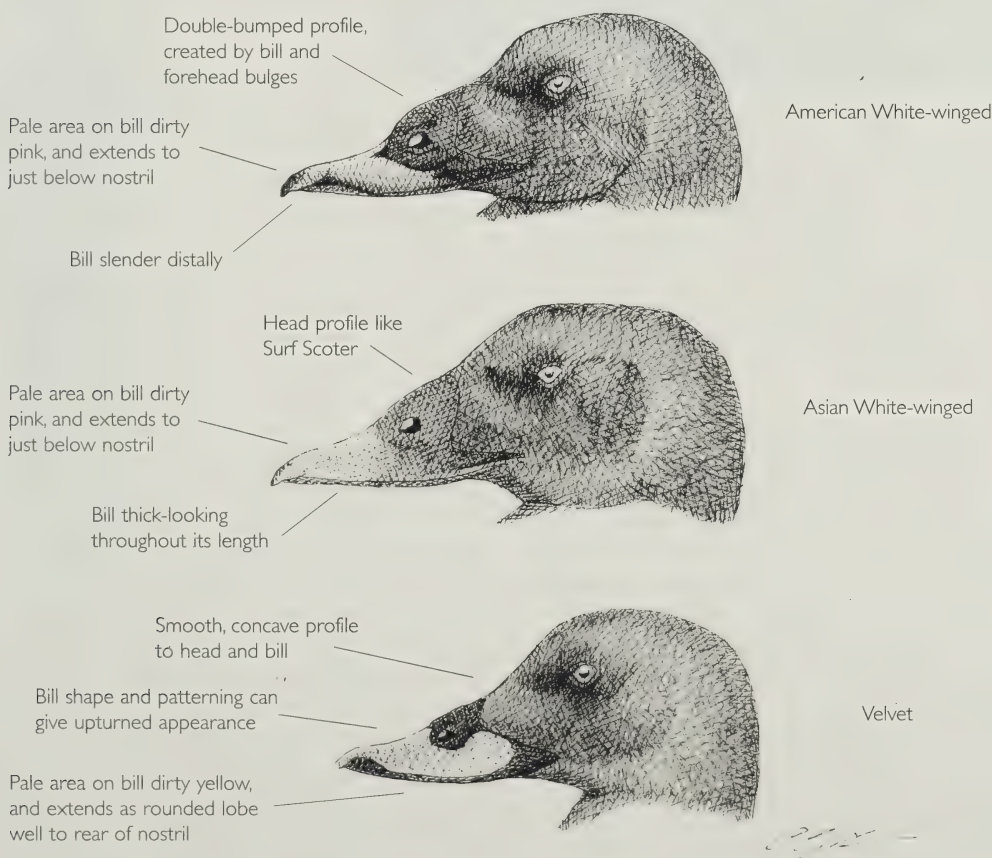


leaving Velvet Scoter as a separate, monotypic species. The two taxa comprising the White-winged Scoter are morphologically quite distinct and the adult males at least are readily separable; these are commonly referred to as 'American White-winged Scoter' *M. d. deglandi* and 'Asian White-winged Scoter' (or 'Stejneger's Scoter') *M. d. stejnegeri*.

Collinson *et al.* (2006) also argued that sufficient evidence exists for splitting *M. fusca* from the other two forms, and in fact they provided convincing arguments for treating all three taxa as distinct species. For males, differences in bill shape, bill colour and facial feathering around the bill are almost completely diagnostic, with nostril shape and eye crescents also differing between Velvet and White-winged (but not diagnostically between *deglandi* and *stejnegeri*). With regard to female bill shape, they state that 'there are differences, at the population level, among *fusca*, *deglandi* and *stej-*

*negeri* possibly approaching a stepped discontinuity'. Earlier, Garner (1999) and Garner *et al.* (2004) had established that immature birds are also diagnosable. On the basis of available evidence, Collinson *et al.* concluded that: '*deglandi* and *fusca* should be treated as separate species under criterion 4.1 of Helbig *et al.* (2002), as allopatric taxa that are "fully diagnosable in each of several discrete or continuously varying characters, related to different functional contexts"'. Because of a lack of comparable data for *stejnegeri*, they concluded that this taxon was best retained as a subspecies of White-winged Scoter until further research was carried out.

The Blackdog bird provided the first opportunity in Europe to appreciate just how distinctive first-summer White-winged Scoters can be (fig. 2, plates 108 & 109). Structural features are critical, and observers faced with a putative *deglandi* or *stejnegeri* should concentrate on head shape, and the



**Fig. 2.** Head profiles of (from top to bottom) first-summer male 'American White-winged Scoter' *Melanitta d. deglandi*, 'Asian White-winged Scoter' *M. d. stejnegeri* and Velvet Scoter *M. fusca*.

David Cooper



David Cooper



**108 & 109.** First-summer male 'American White-winged Scoter' *Melanitta d. deglandi*, Point Pelee, Ontario, May 2011. This individual is a very good match for the Blackdog bird, and sports a double-bumped profile and limited fleshy area on the bill. The head is rather square, very unlike the gently rounded shape shown by Velvet Scoter *M. fusca*. Note that the development of the white eye crescent varies individually – on this bird it appears more extensive than on the Blackdog bird. As the bird matures, its bill will develop the strong square nostril bulge shown by adults and the arching eye crescent.

shape and precise coloration of any pale areas on the bill. Contrast between the brown flanks and darker mantle is strongly indicative of adult *M. d. deglandi*, but immatures of all three taxa are extensively brown, rendering this less critical (though of course a bird with black flanks should not prove to be *deglandi*). First-summer birds lack the gaudy bill ornamentation and coloration of adults, but second-summer birds are much more adult-like, and some are best aged as 'adult types' (Dwight 1914; Pyle 2008).

### Distribution

'American White-winged Scoter' breeds from northwest Alaska east to Hudson Bay and south to southern Manitoba, Canada. It

winters on both coasts of North America, reaching as far south as California in the west and South Carolina in the east. 'Asian White-winged Scoter' is restricted to eastern Asia, where it breeds in Siberia east of the Altai Mountains and Yenisey River to Kamchatka, and south to northern Mongolia. It winters on the ice-free coasts of the western Pacific Ocean and East China Sea south to southern China (Collinson *et al.* 2006). As a breeding bird, Velvet Scoter is now restricted to northern Scandinavia and northern Russia east to the Yenisey River in Siberia (at least), where it is common in the taiga zone. It winters from the neck of the Baltic Sea, into the North Sea and Atlantic Ocean, with smaller numbers also wintering in the Black, Mediterranean and Caspian Seas.

### Records of White-winged Scoter in the Western Palearctic

Prior to 2011, the only Western Palearctic records of 'American White-winged Scoter' were from Iceland. That monopoly was broken with the discovery of the Blackdog bird, and this was quickly followed by another first-summer male, in the Faeroe Islands in July

2011. These were clearly different individuals, based on bill colour and structure. 'Asian White-winged Scoter' has occurred in the Western Palearctic on 11 occasions, the most recent record (at the time of writing) being in Denmark in 2014. A bird seen and photographed at Musselburgh, Lothian, in December 2013 is also considered to have been an 'Asian White-winged Scoter' by some commentators, but at the time of writing this record has not been submitted to BBRC.

Records of 'American White-winged Scoter' *M. d. deglandi* and 'Asian White-winged Scoter' *M. d. stejnegeri* in the Western Palearctic are summarised below. An asterisk denotes that a record has not yet been reviewed by the relevant records committee.



## 'American White-winged Scoter'

### Denmark

\*Blåvands Huk, Esbjerg, adult male, 23rd January to 26th March 2013.

### Iceland

Foss, Fossfjörður (V-Barðastrandarsýsla county), adult male, in eider colony, 3rd June 1993.

Þvottáskriður (S-Múlasýsla county), two adult males, 4th June 1998; one adult male, 6th June 1998; two adult males, 2nd July 1998.

Reykjarfjörður, Suðurfirðir (V-Barðastrandarsýsla county), adult male, 23rd June 2000.

Þvottáskriður (S-Múlasýsla county), adult male, 12th–17th July 2001; presumed same, Reykjarfjörður, Suðurfirði (V-Barðastrandarsýsla county), 17th–27th June 2003; Hvalnesskriður (S-Múlasýsla county), 23rd–24th April 2005; Foss, Fossfjörður (V-Barðastrandarsýsla county), 27th May to 30th June 2005; Reykjarfjörður, Suðurfirðir (V-Barðastrandarsýsla county), 17th July 2005.

Kirkjuból, Skutulsfjörður (N-Ísafjarðarsýsla county), adult male, 20th May 2006; presumed same Þvottáskriður (S-Múlasýsla), 30th April to 9th May 2007 and 2nd–7th July 2007.

Bakkatjörn, Seltjarnarnes (Gullbringusýsla county), adult male, 26th May to 12th June 2008.

\*Þvottáskriður (S-Múlasýsla county), adult male, 5th–10th May 2008.

\*Njarðvík (Gullbringusýsla county), adult male, 20th–25th February and 27th–29th March 2010. Perhaps same bird 17th March 2012; presumed same 28th February to 23rd March 2013, 20th December 2013 to 20th March 2014 and 14th June 2014; presumed same Garður, 29th March 2014.

\*Vík, Reykjanes, adult male, 16th October 2011.

\*Bakkatjörn, Seltjarnarnes, southwest Iceland, adult male, 16th May 2012. Same as 2008?

\*Grandi, Reykjavík, southwest Iceland, adult male, 4th to 18th February 2014.

\*Gerðhamrar, Dýrafjörður, northwest Iceland, adult male, 11th February 2014.

\*Örfirisey/Reykjavík, southwest Iceland, adult male, 20th February to 13th March 2014, presumed same 28th November 2014 to 15th January 2015.

\*Kolgrafafjörður, west Iceland, first-winter male, 28th February to 19th April 2014.

\*Helguvík, Iceland, adult male, 13th March 2014.

### Faeroe Islands

Vestmanna/Streymoy, first-summer male, 1st July 2011.

### Finland

Åland, southwest Finland, adult male, 11th–13th June 2012.

### Scotland

One record

Blackdog/Murcar, North-east Scotland, first-summer male, 11th–23rd June 2011.

## 'Asian White-winged Scoter'

### Denmark

Blavandshuk, adult male, 12th–18th October 2009; presumed same 19th March 2010, 5th March 2011, and 13th–14th October 2014.

### Finland

Kemio, southwest Finland, adult male, 27th May to 8th June 1996 (Lindroos 1997).

Hanko, southwest Finland, adult male, 27th May to 12th June 2012.

### France

Baie de Somme, northern France, adult male, 4th December 1886 (recently reidentified from specimen; see Jiguet 2007).

### Iceland

Valþjófsstaðir, Núpasveit (N-Þingeyjarsýsla county), adult male, 6th April to 2nd May 2003.

### Ireland

Rossbeigh Strand, Co. Kerry, adult male, 7th March 2011 (initially seen in November 2009, and again in January 2010, December 2010 and January–March 2011 but not positively identified until 7th March 2011).

## Norway

Persfjordena, Varanger, first-summer male, 21st June 2011.

## Poland

Ptasi Raj, Bay of Gdansk, adult male, 10th March 2007.

## Spain

\*Ensenada de San Simón, Vilaboa-Soutomaior, Pontevedra, Galicia, adult male, 23rd December 2011, present for at least 15 days; presumed same A Lanzada Bay, O Grove, southwest Galicia, 27th December 2011 to 2nd January 2012.

## Sweden

\*Migrating northeast, Utlängan, Blekinge, adult male, 3rd May 2012.

\*Migrating northeast, Utlängan, Blekinge, adult male, 5th May 2014.

## Birds not identified to a particular race

### Iceland

\*Höfn, southeast Iceland, race uncertain, first-winter male, 30th January to 15th March 2013.

## Norway

\*Fuglingane, Hodnesanden, Ro, Norway, race uncertain, first-summer male, 14th July 2012.

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## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Zbigniew Kajzer (Poland) and Yann Kolbeinsson (Iceland) for help with tracing records and supplying photographs. David Cooper, Nick Littlewood, Micky Maher and Martin Scott kindly provided photographs for reference and for use in this article. Martin Garner's invaluable insights proved key to identifying the bird. We also thank local birders Phil Bloor, Ian Broadbent, Phil Crockett, Ian Gordon and Nick Littlewood for discussions that led to the identification of the bird. Most of all, our thanks go to Nick Littlewood for obtaining the critical photographs of the bird.

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**Editorial comment** Adam Rowlands, Chairman of BBRC, commented: 'This was a taxon that had been on the keen rarity finder's radar for a number of years. Even before it had been elevated to species status, the articles referred to by the authors, by current BBRC member Martin Garner, drew attention to the identification of the Asian and American forms and encouraged rarity hunters to look for them. Nonetheless, the discovery of the first American White-winged Scoter for Britain so soon after the confirmation of the first Asian White-winged Scoter for Ireland was still a surprise. All credit must go to the finders and identifiers of the Scottish bird, whose dedication and careful analysis should not be underestimated. The whole episode – discovery, confirmation and documentation – provides a best-practice example of rarity recording. The excellent description, complete with the sketches reproduced here, was submitted along with a raft of supporting images from Nick Littlewood, all of which were important in confirming the identification. This enabled a relatively smooth assessment process for BBRC members and, while there was some discussion about the age of the bird, with some questions as to whether a second-summer could be definitely eliminated given some of the detail visible in other published images of the bird, it was unanimously accepted on first circulation between January and May 2012. Note that we could find no evidence to support the claim of the bird still being present on 24th June.'



‘The challenge of locating vagrant scoters amongst the vast, but often distant flocks that congregate at favoured locations around the British coast remains. How long will it be before the next American or first Asian White-winged Scoter is located? Any observers lucky enough to discover one would do well to refer to the features in this account, and the articles by Martin Garner, in order to confirm the identification.’

Martin Collinson, Chairman of BOURC, commented: ‘With multiple previous occurrences of White-winged Scoters in Iceland, it seemed inevitable that one would eventually be found here. The observers should nevertheless be congratulated on their persistence in sticking with this first-summer bird until they could confirm the identification. The descriptions and photographs confirmed that it was a White-winged Scoter. The bill-and-head profile was a perfect match for the American subspecies *M. d. deglandi*, but elimination of the Asian subspecies *M. d. stejnegeri* was not completely straightforward. Examination of images online and museum specimens confirmed (as described in this paper) that a first-summer *stejnegeri* would have a more triangular, Surf Scoter *M. perspicillata*-like bill profile, not showing the distinctive stepped appearance of nominate *deglandi*. BOURC concurred with BBRCs acceptance of the Blackdog individual as a nominate (North American) bird. White-winged Scoter is kept in captivity in Europe (see, for example, <http://tinyurl.com/mekh2fc>) but is rare, and BOURC considered the possibility of the Blackdog bird being an escapee to be vanishingly small. There was no reason to doubt the provenance, so BOURC added the species to Category A of the British List. There is still no published genetic analysis of Velvet and White-winged Scoters. However, available “barcoding” database sequences do not provide any strong support for a split between nominate *deglandi* and *stejnegeri*.’

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## Correction

We apologise for an error in the layouts for ‘Best Bird Book of the Year 2014’ in last month’s issue of *BB* (*Brit. Birds* 108: 112–114), when the texts describing the second- and fifth-placed books were inadvertently copied from the 2013 award. The correct text is given below, and you can read the whole article on our website at: [www.britishbirds.co.uk/birding-resources/book-of-the-year](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk/birding-resources/book-of-the-year)

### 2nd Ten Thousand Birds: ornithology since Darwin

By Tim Birkhead, Jo Wimpenny and Bob Montgomerie; Princeton University Press, 2014

*Reviewed in BB by Alan Knox* (*Brit. Birds* 107: 373–374)

Ornithology did, of course, start before Darwin and the senior author has indeed written about that (and his efforts have appeared in these rankings before). Post Darwin, however, all manner of questions could be investigated from a different perspective and this review provides an excellent overview of where scientific ornithology is now.

### 5th Forty Years of Evolution: Darwin’s Finches on Daphne Major Island

By Peter R. Grant and B. Rosemary Grant; Princeton University Press, 2014

*Reviewed in BB by David Parkin* (*Brit. Birds* 107: 708–709)

An account of evolution by natural selection demonstrably in action, fittingly among the eponymous finches of evolution’s most famous proponent. The effort and devotion involved, 40 years on a small island with birds individually known, is simply breathtaking. Not everyone will find this book easy to read, but the lessons are very important.

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## Announcement

### BB Bird Photograph of the Year 2015

The 39th *BB* Bird Photograph of the Year competition, with the main sponsor once again being Anglian Water, is free to enter and seeks to recognise the best and/or the most scientifically interesting photographs of Western Palearctic birds taken during 2014. In addition to the main awards, there is a digiscoping section. Up to three images may be entered for each competition. For full details of the rules and how to submit entries, go to [www.britishbirds.co.uk/about/bird-photograph-of-the-year](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk/about/bird-photograph-of-the-year)

# Obituary

## Derek Raymond Moore (1943–2014)

Derek was one of the most articulate, passionate and dynamic ambassadors for practical wildlife conservation to have lived in recent years and one whom I was proud to call a friend. He is a sad loss to the UK conservation world. Derek was born and brought up in Suffolk where his obsession with birds began. Although his early career was spent in the finance sector of the banking, printing and shipping industries, this put him in good stead for the role of Director of the Suffolk Wildlife Trust (SWT), which he took on in 1985. Grabbing the chance to make a difference to his beloved Suffolk, Derek was to lead a transformation in the way the wildlife trusts were organised and interacted with their members.

Derek's lack of formal conservation training was no barrier to his understanding of wildlife and probably helped in his somewhat unorthodox and innovative approach to conservation issues. Individuals who have big ideas and then put them into action are rare, but Derek was one of those people. It sometimes took all his powers of persuasion to convince partners, funders (notably the Big Lottery), trustees and staff that his somewhat radical ideas were worth considering; but convince them he did. Derek believed in working with critical partners such as the RSPB, English Nature and local farmers. He oversaw the move to new offices, funded and built education centres, saw Redgrave and Lopham Fen and Bradfield Woods raised to the status of National Nature Reserves, insisted on free entry to reserves (highly controversial at the

time), and introduced konik ponies from Poland to manage wetland sites. Membership increased dramatically, as did the profile and reputation of the conservation movement in Suffolk.

Derek was determined to create a professional, go-ahead organisation that was both financially viable and led the way with nature conservation management. He achieved this and much more. For all this hard work Derek was awarded the OBE for services to nature conservation in 1998.

Derek's straight-talking style didn't always make him friends but brought a lot of respect. After 14 years at SWT, Derek decided it was time to move on and from 1999 to 2001 he worked at The Wildlife Trusts HQ. Then, just before retirement, he took on the role of rescuing the wildlife trust movement in south and west Wales; an aim achieved with the usual efficiency. The move to Wales was significant as he settled down to life near Llandeilo and began to explore the wildlife habitats around him. Becoming Chair of the Welsh Ornithological Society (WOS) was just one of the roles that Derek took on in retirement. Positive change followed wherever Derek went and WOS, too, moved into a new era. During this time Derek was persuaded to write an account of his birding years – an intriguing insight into the varied aspects of his obsession for birds (*Brit. Birds* 107: 52).

Derek always had time for fellow conservationists and mentored many people in his lifetime, as he himself had been mentored as a boy in Suffolk. Derek fought for wildlife right until the end. He never stopped believing that wildlife declines could be reversed, and hopefully his passion for the natural world will be a legacy that many younger conservationists will inherit. A great conservationist and a dear friend – he is greatly missed.

Derek is survived by his wife Beryl, his daughter Bronwen, son Jeremy, daughter-in-law Saskia and his three grandchildren, Morris, Tara and Holly.

Anne Brenchley



110. Jabiru at last! Derek in Costa Rica in 2009.



# Letters

## Important Bird Areas in Cyprus

The text accompanying the recent Important Bird Areas article on the Akrotiri Peninsula–Episkopi Cliffs, in Cyprus (Anastasi & Hellicar 2014), contained many statements about the local avifauna that, as a former Cyprus bird recorder (1999–2000), I found difficult to fathom. Perhaps the most surprising claim is that Eurasian Curlews *Numenius arquata* occur in ‘globally important numbers’. Flint & Stewart (1992) mentioned exceptional flocks of up to 80 individuals, but in more recent years there has been a decline, so that counts of more than single-figure numbers in winter are now unusual. Spur-winged Lapwings *Vanellus spinosus* and Stone-curlews *Burhinus oedicnemus* are reported as ‘other notable breeders’. Over the past 15 years or so Spur-winged Lapwings have increased at other sites on Cyprus, but are still scarce on the peninsula, and rarely breed there. Stone-curlews gather together to form winter roosts at such places as Mandria, Larnaca airport, and Dhekelia Garrison, but they remain scarce at Akrotiri, and breeding has rarely been proved. Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus*, Pallid Harriers *Circus macrourus*, and Saker Falcons *Falco cherrug* are said to occur in ‘small but globally important numbers’. The

Pallid Harriers that pass through in small numbers may well be significant in a Western Palearctic context, but certainly not in a global one, whereas Saker Falcon sightings have averaged about five or six a year in recent times, and there have been just one or two Egyptian Vultures. The essence of conservation is accurate recording, and this appears not to be demonstrated here.

A visit to this site can be a magical experience. Many British birders visit in late August, in order to see the Demoiselle Cranes *Grus virgo*, at a time when the sky is full of circling Honey-buzzards *Pernis apivorus*. Later, in September, there may be hundreds of Red-footed Falcons *Falco vespertinus* roosting in the trees and on power lines, and when water levels are favourable, the salt lake is full of thousands of Greater Flamingos *Phoenicopterus roseus* and other waterbirds. In my view, that sense of excitement for the visiting birder was not conveyed.

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**Editorial comment** Martin Hellicar has replied as follows: ‘The use of the term “globally important” in the Akrotiri article relates to the standardised criteria by which the BirdLife International Partnership identifies Important Bird Areas, or IBAs, globally. The selection of IBAs is made using quantitative thresholds, grounded in up-to-date knowledge of the sizes and trends of particular bird populations in Europe and indeed the world, assessed against those recorded at each site. Numbers of Eurasian Curlews or raptors of global conservation concern occurring at the Akrotiri IBA may not seem impressive from the birding point of view, but are nonetheless significant from a conservation standpoint and meet the thresholds of the relevant IBA criteria. The A1/C1 criteria for the Egyptian Vulture, for example, now requires only the regular occurrence of the species at a site, irrespective of abundance, so rare has it become, while 30 individuals, regularly occurring, are sufficient for the Eurasian Curlew (recently assessed as being Near Threatened, as a result of a “moderately rapid global decline” in several key populations) under the same criteria. The thing to hold onto here is that IBAs are about building a network of sites across a flyway, with the aim of securing the long-term survival (and revival!) of species such as the Egyptian Vulture.

‘It is also perhaps worth adding that while BirdLife Cyprus birding records over the years were very important in estimating populations of breeding and visiting species for the Akrotiri area in

the context of the recently completed Cyprus IBA revision project, relevant data were also drawn from a wide variety of other sources. Data from the Game & Fauna Service, local and visiting ornithologists and both ongoing and purpose-designed BirdLife Cyprus field surveys were amassed alongside birding records to draw conclusions about the status of species, such as the Stone-curlew, in the Akrotiri area. Critique of the article's capacity to 'excite' is of course welcome (we did our best!), but the suggestion that the population estimates for the article were not based on accurate recording is regrettable and a long way from the truth.'

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### A reference checked

'Aelian, who speaks of the daring of Kites in the second century, and accuses them of snatching hair from men's heads, when engaged in nesting.' So wrote J. H. Gurney in 1921, in his book *Early Annals of Ornithology*. Some years later, that story was taken up and added to by David Lack (*The Life of the Robin*, 1943), who went on to say that it happened in London.

However, there is a problem here in that a search of Aelian fails to find any such account. Nowadays, via <https://archive.org/> there is free access to an English translation of the ancient Greek of Aelian's *De Animalium Natura* [*Characteristics of Animals*]. A word search facility comes with the full text. Adrian White, a friend with knowledge of classical literature, searched a hard copy of the relevant volume and also found no reference to hair snatching or to London. Furthermore, I consulted Cillian O'Hogan, Curator of Classical and Byzantine Studies at The

British Library, who searched the ancient Greek text and found no reference to hair snatching, and commented: 'I cannot find any mention of London in Aelian or indeed in any Greek authors aside from Ptolemy's *Geography*.'

The matter does not end with Gurney and Lack, because Mark Cocker and Richard Mabey (*Birds Britannica*, 2005, p. 117) repeated the story of kites snatching hair, quoting Lack, while in turn both Ian Carter (*The Red Kite*, 2007, p. 139) and Andrew Self (*The Birds of London*, 2014, p. 124) referred to this behaviour, giving Cocker & Mabey as a reference.

If the writers who followed Gurney had checked the original source, albeit in translation, they would have been saved from error – which, once published, is then impossible to withdraw. This issue certainly has implications for researchers, supervisors, peer reviewers, writers and publishers.

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### Rachel Carson

I support Jeremy Greenwood in his efforts to commemorate the life and achievements of the late Rachel Carson (*Brit. Birds* 107: 702–703). In addition to her scientific work as a marine biologist, Carson possessed rare literary talent, and was the author of a trilogy of excellent books on the sea (see below). The earnings from her writing gave her the financial independence to resign her position in the US Fish & Wildlife Service and write *Silent Spring*.

Jeremy is correct to warn of the dangers of corporate attacks on science, when profits are

inconveniently endangered by scientific evidence, and this theme is explored by Carson's biographer (Lear 1997). Rachel Carson's message remains as relevant now as during her all-too-short lifetime.

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## Spinning phalaropes

In their useful notes about the spinning feeding behaviour of phalaropes, Chandler *et al.* (2015) do not mention feeding behaviour at sea in the winter. The behaviour of phalaropes around frontal areas in the Southern California Bight, where they feed on the sea surface on such things as fish eggs without resorting to energetically expensive spinning, was discussed by DiGiacomo *et al.* (2002). Two of the three species gather in wary flocks over the areas of upwelling along the shelf break further out at sea around the tropical land-masses, the Grey *Phalaropus fulicarius* predominating off the western coasts of Africa, the Red-necked *P. lobatus* off the southern coasts of Asia, and both occurring off western South America (Meinertzhagen 1925, one of his better contributions). These areas have regular trade winds or monsoons with a moderate

swell and little calm water. I don't remember seeing any of many hundreds of birds there actually feeding but it seems unlikely that they would need to spin with such turbulent water – doubtless they just grab what zoo-plankton passes by, or perhaps some even feed from the air.

I am indebted to Martin Collinson for directing my attention to the work in California.

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 Meinertzhagen, R. 1925. The distribution of the phalaropes. *Ibis* 1925: 325–344.

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## Reviews

### Birds and Climate Change: impacts and conservation responses

By James Pearce-Higgins and Rhys Green

Cambridge University Press, 2014

467pp, 154 black-and-white illustrations, 21 tables

Hbk, ISBN 978-0-521-11428-8, £74.99

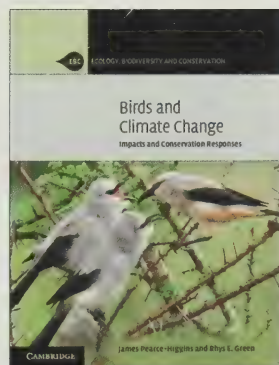
Pbk, ISBN 978-0-521-13219-0, £39.99

This book is part of the widely acclaimed series of studies into Ecology, Biodiversity and Conservation published in recent years by CUP. It is a detailed appraisal of the effects of climate change on birds, written from the standpoint of two scientists who rightly understand that our climate is changing and provide compelling evidence that human activities are playing a large part in driving this forward.

The book comes in two parts, dealing with the impacts of changing climate upon bird populations and the consequential implications for their conservation. Each chapter has a very useful summary in the form of a series of bullet points. I found the most interesting

sections to be those reviewing climate change mitigation: solar energy, wind power, hydroelectric, tidal barrages, nuclear – concluding that biofuels pose the 'triple whammy' of destroying habitat that both hosts important biodiversity and stores environmental carbon, while at the same time driving the replacement of natural habitat with agricultural land.

The likely effects of climate change on Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus* is a very instructive case study. It was interesting to learn that, along with other upland species, the long-



term fate of this bird will depend upon how landowners manage the habitat. Unwise or ill-advised mitigation could lead to the loss of this charismatic member of our fauna.

The detail that has gone into this book is extraordinary: there are more than 1,400 references taking up over 60 pages of the text. In places, it is very technical and does not make for easy reading, but is essential for those in the conservation movement. I would like to think that it will be widely read in the corridors of power, but (alas) there seem to be

rather few in Government (certainly in the Commons) with sufficient knowledge of scientific method to appreciate its content and detail.

Rhys Green needs no introduction to British birders, and anyone who reads this excellent though challenging book will understand why the BTO has recently appointed James Pearce-Higgins as its Director of Science.

David Parkin

## The Howard and Moore Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World 4th edn. Vol. 2: Passerines

Edited by E. C. Dickinson and L. Christidis  
Aves Press, 2014

Hbk, 752pp; and CD

ISBN 978-0-9568611-2-2, £80.00

This is the second volume of the 4th edition of the 'Howard and Moore' Checklist. The first volume was reviewed previously (*Brit. Birds* 107: 179–180) and the comments made there also apply here. The editors have, in this volume, reaffirmed their commitment to the academic and professional community, producing an accurate and authoritative reference work. A total of 6,063 species of passerine, with all their subspecies, are detailed in the same format as the 4,072 non-passerines in the previous volume. The species list obviously occupies the bulk of the book. The passerine families are presented in an extensively revised, unfamiliar sequence, compared with the 3rd edition (2003), and an extensive introductory chapter by Joel Cracraft reviews the new, primarily molecular, studies that underlie this new sequence. In contrast to the species-level taxonomy of 'Howard and Moore', which is often noted to be rather conservative, the Checklist is very self-confident when it comes to generic and higher-order changes. From a Western Palearctic viewpoint, it will remain to be seen whether it is helpful or informative to break up such familiar large genera as *Phylloscopus*, *Sylvia* and *Emberiza* into multiple new (or resurrected) genera when such changes are not absolutely required to maintain monophyly. There are nine appendices either

in print  
or on the  
enclosed  
CD. Some  
of them are  
straight  
reprints

from Volume 1, which seems a little unnecessary. Notable new additions include a treatment of extinct species by Tommy Tyrberg (in consultation with BirdLife International) and a version of the Checklist as an Excel file.

Comparisons will be drawn with other World Checklists, perhaps most topically the *HBW and BirdLife International Illustrated Checklist of the Birds of the World* (del Hoyo & Collar 2014), the non-passerine volume of which was published recently. 'Howard and Moore' lacks the range maps and colour illustrations contained in 'HBW', but both are astonishingly thorough and professional reference works. 'HBW' has the higher standard of presentation, with an accompanying higher price, and is arguably more accessible for birders. 'Howard and Moore' on the other hand remains the go-to guide on matters of nomenclature and authority.

Martin Collinson





## The Passenger Pigeon

By Errol Fuller

Princeton University Press, 2014

Hbk, 177pp; many colour illustrations and photos

ISBN 978-0-691-16295-9, £19.95

Monday 1st September 2014 was the centenary of the death of Martha, a Passenger Pigeon *Ectopistes migratorius* living in a cage at Cincinnati Zoo in Ohio, USA. The anniversary has been reported around the world, and has resulted in the publication of several books. Martha was the last Passenger Pigeon to survive, despite the species having once been North America's commonest bird. Her body has been out of view for some time, but thankfully the Smithsonian Institution has put her back on display once again – and rightly so!

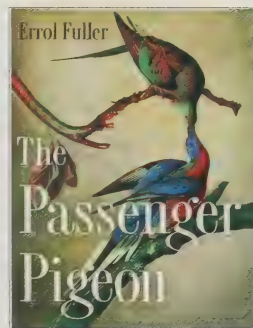
This book provides an overview of everything one might want to know about the Passenger Pigeon. There are other books that give a lot more detail about the species but the author mixes together an interesting selection of images with quotations from those interviewed about the species' decline. By the 1850s it was already clear that the Passenger Pigeon was declining, and measures were being sought to protect it. For many years these birds were shot in their thousands, and few people worried about this because it is said that flocks numbered millions. In the end

it was probably a mixture of overhunting and deforestation that

caused numbers to fall to worrying levels. It is also said that once the population size was at a low level the species' gene pool was insufficient to allow the birds to rebuild their numbers.

Errol Fuller has sourced many photographs of Passenger Pigeons, and has also gathered together in one place many paintings of Passenger Pigeons. One chapter explores the way that we have celebrated Passenger Pigeons in art – including the enormous mural that was recently erected on the side of a building in Cincinnati. An interesting appendix by Julian Pender Hume describes the anatomy of the species, demonstrating that it was in fact a very strong flier. It underlines even further that despite being superbly adapted for its lifestyle of mass movement, the Passenger Pigeon could not survive against all odds.

Keith Betton



## RSPB Seabirds

By Marianne Taylor, photographs by David Tipling

Bloomsbury, 2014

Hbk, 240pp; numerous colour photographs

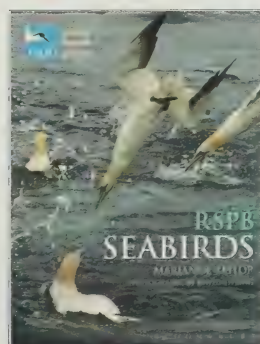
ISBN 978-1-4729-0901-5, £25.00

The large format, numerous photographs (many occupying half or a third of a page) and wide margins suggests this is 'just another coffee-table book', but a dip into the text shows that Marianne Taylor has done a lot of background reading in preparing an in-depth summary for the popular market. Coverage is of all seabird species that occur in or have visited Britain and Ireland. Breeding species are given their own accounts, divided in standard headings and accompanied by one or two thematic text boxes, while winter visitors, migrants and vagrants are dealt with at the end of each Order or Family under

'other species'.

Exactly what constitutes a 'seabird' is always open to debate. The definition used here

of 'true seabirds' is of species that 'are obliged by their biology to forage for most if not all of their food out at sea, at least during the non-breeding season'. This is stretched somewhat by the inclusion of, for example, Brent Goose *Branta bernicla* and Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*, although the accompanying text describes the extent of their use



of the marine habitat.

The text is well written, informative, largely up to date, and broadly accurate. I qualify the last because it is not difficult to pick up on errors, misperceptions or omissions. In most winters rather more than 'one or two' White-billed Divers *Gavia adamsii* are found in British waters, and a glance at the only photograph of a Great Northern Diver *G. immer* (a first-winter with a gleamingly pale bill) shows that separating the two species by the 'dark bill' of the latter doesn't work all year round. Misperceptions include a strange little paragraph on Fulmars *Fulmarus glacialis*, oil pollution and ingested plastic, and a textbox that implies the Snake Pipefish *Entelurus aequoreus* phenomenon of 2006–08 is an ongoing problem for British breeding seabirds. These and other glitches should really have been picked up during editing; the book is very much an RSPB production and greater input from the many seabird biologists now working there could have helped with this.

The photographs of breeding species range from adequate to excellent and evocative,

although there could have been more colony and fewer portrait shots; in particular, an aerial photograph of one of the larger gannetries would have emphasised the sheer scale of the colonies on Grassholm, St Kilda or the Bass Rock. Not all the photographs are David Tipling's, and some of non-breeding seabirds are rather disappointing: the only photo of Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus* is an overhead shot of a tatty adult in heavy moult against a suspiciously tropical sky (rather than a line of spoon-tails forging northwards in May against a deep Atlantic swell), while the single photo of Little Auk *Alle alle* shows a hunched, wing-drooping individual at death's door, which perpetuates the myth that this is the species' normal posture in winter.

In summary, while this book does a good job of educating the general public about British and Irish seabirds, I could have used 'excellent job' had a little more care and thought been taken in the final stages of production.

*Martin Heubeck*

## First Impressions

By Lisa Hooper

Langford Press, 2014

Hbk, 162pp; many colour photographs and illustrations

ISBN 978-1-904078-63-0, £37.99

This is the latest title from the Langford Press 'Wildlife in Art' series. This large-format book showcases Lisa Hooper's prints, and tells the story of her development from a career conservationist to a full-time printmaker. It also contains personal thoughts about birds, art and poetry. If you like a particular artist, these books are a reasonably economical way to enjoy a large sample of their work.

The prints themselves, mainly birds but with a few mammals and plants, are on the whole straightforward compositions, resulting in bold, decorative images which, as Hooper explains, are deliberately simplistic – partly dictated by limitations of the printmaking process, and partly to fulfil her artistic ambitions 'to move towards simplicity without losing integrity or expression'. Several chapters are built around the many printmaking techniques practised, including woodcut, lino print, etching and monotype.

As the book reveals, creating these prints is far from simple. Considerable time, effort and skill is required to produce the blocks and plates from which the prints are taken, and the explanatory detail included about each method takes it to the point of becoming almost a printmaking handbook. This is all liberally illustrated with examples of the various stages of each printmaking process, as well as numerous examples of the finished prints.

If you are interested in printmaking, or a fan of Lisa Hooper's work, you will probably want to have a look at this book. And for collectors of the 'Wildlife in Art' series, with this title being number 37 your shelves will be groaning just that little bit more.

*Howard Towll*





# Recent reports

Compiled by Barry Nightingale and Harry Hussey

This summary of unchecked reports covers early January to early February 2015.

**Headlines** As expected at this time of year, it was mainly waterfowl and gulls that grabbed the attention, with a variety of popular long-stayers. Among the new arrivals, most unexpected was the adult Slaty-backed Gull that spent two days at Killybegs in Co. Donegal but others included a Black Scoter off Northumberland, Black Duck on Scilly, Laughing Gull in Cheshire & Wirral, and an Ivory Gull in Highland. A Little Bustard in Norfolk would have proved popular if it had not been shot (see p. 124), and an unseasonal Pacific Golden Plover was a surprise find in Lincolnshire.

**Ross's Goose** *Anser rossii* East Chevington/Druridge Pools (Northumberland), 24th–29th January. **Canada Goose** *Branta canadensis* Small race, North Slob (Co. Wexford), long-stayer to 1st February. **Cackling Goose** *Branta hutchinsii* Long-stayers North Uist (Outer Hebrides), to 24th January; Ballintemple (Co. Sligo), to 30th January. New arrivals West Freugh, 17th January, then Castle Kennedy area (Dumfries & Galloway), 28th January to 8th February; Coombe Hill Meadows (Gloucestershire), 31st January; Cuckmere Haven (Sussex), 4th February, North Uist, 5th–8th February. **Red-breasted Goose** *Branta ruficollis* Stronsay (Orkney), 25th January. **American Wigeon** *Anas americana* Long-stayers in Co. Cork, Cornwall (three), Devon, Co. Donegal (two), Co. Leitrim, North-east Scotland and Shetland; new arrivals at Burton Mere Wetlands (Cheshire & Wirral), Belclare Turlough (Co. Galway), Dornoch (Highland), Holme Pierrepont (Nottinghamshire), North Uist, Cahore (Co. Wexford), Swillington Ings and Nosterfield (both Yorkshire). **Black Duck** *Anas rubripes* Samson, 19th January, then Tresco (Scilly), 27th January to 6th February. **Blue-winged Teal** *Anas discors* The Shunan (Orkney), 17th January to 1st February.

**Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* Long-stayers Slimbridge

(Gloucestershire) and Blashford Lakes (Hampshire). **Lesser Scaup** *Aythya affinis* Long-stayers Trabboch Loch then Martnaham Loch (Ayrshire), Llangorse Lake (Breconshire), Dozmary Pool then Siblyback Lake (Cornwall), Cardiff Bay Wetlands (East Glamorgan) and Lough Gill (Co. Kerry), although a (new) second bird at the last site 12th–24th January. **King Eider** *Somateria spectabilis* Long-stayers Ruddon's Point (Fife), to 22nd January, and Bluemull Sound (Shetland), 29th January; also Maenporth (Cornwall), 27th January to 8th February; St Combs (North-east Scotland), 28th–31st January. **Harlequin Duck** *Histrionicus histrionicus* Aberdeen (North-east Scotland), long-stayer to 8th February. **Black Scoter** *Melanitta americana* Rossbeigh (Co. Kerry), long-stayer to 8th February. Cheswick Sands (Northumberland), 21st January to 8th February. **Surf Scoter** *Melanitta perspicillata* Long-stayers in Denbighshire (up to five), Co. Down, Fife,



John Malloy

**III.** First-winter male Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus*, River Don, Aberdeen, North-east Scotland, February 2015.



**112.** First-winter Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla*, New Brighton, Cheshire & Wirral, February 2015.

Lothian, Suffolk/Essex; also Rosslare (Co. Wexford), 17th January to 8th February, with second bird 24th January to 7th February; Unst (Shetland), 18th–25th January; Clogher Head, 25th–31st January, and Hermitage (both Co. Louth), 26th January. **Velvet Scoter** *Melanitta fusca* Ferny Ness (Lothian), 375, 21st January.

**Pacific Diver** *Gavia pacifica* Mount's Bay (Cornwall), long-stayer to 8th February. **White-billed Diver** *Gavia adamsii* Long-stayers South Ronaldsay (Orkney), 20th January, Kirkabister, 26th January, Bluemull Sound (both Shetland), 29th January.

**Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax* Youghal (Co. Cork), long-stayer to 4th February; also Nickoll's Quarry (Kent), 14th–23rd January; Steyning (Sussex), 25th January. **Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis* Long-stayers Kent (two), same also in Sussex. **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* records from Cambridgeshire, Essex, Lincolnshire and Co. Waterford.

**American Coot** *Fulica americana* Long-

stayers Lough Gill (Co. Kerry), to 8th February, and North Uist, to 7th February. **Little Bustard** *Tetrax tetrax* Blofield (Norfolk), found dead, 22nd January.

**Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva* Alkborough Flats (Lincolnshire), 29th January. **Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularia* Inverallochy (North-east Scotland), long-stayer to 19th January. **Lesser Yellowlegs** *Tringa flavipes* Long-stayers Rogerstown (Co. Dublin), to 26th January; Pett Level and Rye Harbour area (Sussex), to 8th February; also Skibbereen (Co. Cork), 4th February.

**Forster's Tern** *Sterna forsteri* Claddagh (Co. Galway), long-stayer to 7th February. **Ivory Gull** *Pagophila eburnea* Ardair/Ullapool (Highland), 13th–21st January. **Bonaparte's Gull** *Chroicocephalus philadelphia* Long-stayers Loch Gilp (Argyll), again 4th February; Dawlish Warren/Exmouth area (Devon), to 7th February; also Cardiff Bay, 1st February; National Wetlands Centre (Carmarthenshire), 3rd February. **Laughing Gull** *Larus atricilla* Ballycotton, long-stayer to 8th February; New Brighton (Cheshire & Wirral), 3rd–8th February. **Slaty-backed Gull** *Larus schistisagus* Killybegs (Co. Donegal), 17th–18th January.

**Gyr Falcon** *Falco rusticola* Carrowmore Strand, 12th January, and Inishkea South, 4th February, possibly same as Corragoun Lough (all Co. Mayo), in December 2014; Loch of Bosquoy area (Orkney), 24th–25th January.

**Penduline Tit** *Remiz pendulinus* In Devon, three long-stayers at Darts Farm/Topsham to 6th February, presumably same Exminster Marshes, 8th February. **Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus* Chichester GP (Sussex), long-stayer to 19th January; Marton Mere (Lancashire & N Merseyside), 16th January. **Rose-coloured Starling** *Pastor roseus* Prudhoe (Northumberland), long-stayer to 8th February. **Eastern Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros phoenicuroides* St Mary's (Scilly), long-stayer to 12th January. **Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla* Forest Farm Country Park (East Glamorgan), 5th–8th February.





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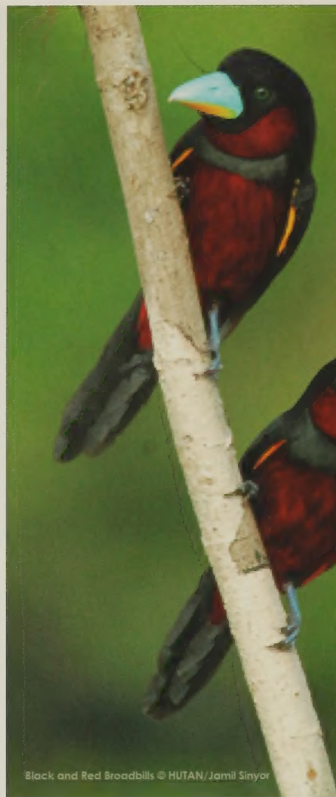
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